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Pocket Series.

NOTES

ON THE

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSONS

FOR 1883.

BY

REV. R. R. MEREDITH, D.D.

Part One.

JANUARY TO MARCH.

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MAP OF PALESTINE.



GENERAL INTRODUCTION

TO LESSONS IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

I. THE AUTHOR. — Our information respecting Luke is exceedingly limited. He does not once mention himself by name in the Gospel, or in the Acts of the Apostles, though undoubtedly he was the author of those books. Only three times is his name mentioned in Scripture. He is described as a physician (Col. iv. : 14), and he is referred to in 2 Tim. iv. : 11, and Philem. 24. From these allusions, as well as from his use of the first person plural in some places, we learn that he was the companion of Paul, and from the context of the first passage we also learn that he was "not of the circumcision." Indeed, tradition has always declared that he was a Gentile, and a "proselyte of the gate." He is said by Eusebius to have been born in Antioch, in Syria, perhaps from identifying him with Lucius (Acts xiii. : 1). Tradition asserts that he was one of the Seventy sent out by our Lord; but this notion probably had its origin in the fact that his gospel alone contains an account of their mission. It is refuted by his preface, where he distinguishes between himself and eye-witnesses. When Paul, just before his martyrdom, writes from his Roman prison to Timothy, "*only Luke is with me*" is his touching testimony to our faithful evangelist. After the death of Paul we lose all sight of Luke. The most authentic tradition, which is, however, of no decisive value, declares that he preached the Gospel mostly in Gaul, and attained the crown of martyrdom.

II. THE BOOK. — It is known to us as the Acts of the Apostles, but this title can hardly have been given to it by the author. Some of the ancient fathers designated it by other names, such as the Gospel of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of the

Risen Lord, etc. The present title would lead one to expect a detailed account of the work of the Apostles. But, except in the case of Peter and Paul, there is not even an approach to this. John appears in the history only three times, and then rather as the companion of Peter, than as doing anything himself; and concerning James, his brother, we have no notice except of his execution by Herod. The book was written by Luke, probably at Rome, though some say Achaia, about A. D. 63. It could not have been written before Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (A. D. 61-63) because the history embraces that event; nor after his release, because it contains no record of his liberation. It has been described as "a special history of the planting and extension of the church, both among Jews and Gentiles, by the gradual establishing of radiating centres or sources of influence at certain salient points throughout a large part of the empire, beginning at Jerusalem and ending at Rome." The history naturally falls into two general divisions: the first (chaps. i.-xii.) records the planting and extension of Christianity among the Jews. Jerusalem is the centre, and Peter the prominent figure. The second (chaps. xiii.-xxviii.) has for its subject the planting and growth of Christianity among the Gentiles with Antioch as the centre, and Paul the most prominent actor.

STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

FIRST QUARTER.

JAN. 7, 1883.]

LESSON I.

[Acts 1:1-14.]

THE ASCENDING LORD.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up." — Verse 9.

TIME. — May, A. D. 30. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem; Mount of Olives.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) The ¹former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, (2) until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the ²Holy Ghost unto the

¹ Gr. *first*.

² *Holy Spirit*; and so throughout this book.

1. **The former treatise.** — The Gospel of Luke (comp. its introduction, chap. 1: 1-4). — *Abbott*. Literally, *word*, or *discourse*. The Greek term had been used by Xenophon as St. Luke uses it, of what we should call the several "Books" or portions of his Histories. — *Ellicott*. **Theophilus.** — As to this person we have no historical or certain information, although various conjectures are proposed respecting him. The name, according to Greek etymology, denotes a Friend of God. — *Alexander*. That he was a Christian appears clear from Luke 1: 4; the title applied to him, *most excellent Theophilus*, indicates rank as well as character (see Acts 23: 26; 24: 3; 26: 25); hence it is probable that he held some high position, but what or where is wholly unknown. — *Abbott*. **All that Jesus began both to do and to teach.** — From the arrangement of these words in the original Greek, two things are plain which escape the English reader. First, there is an emphasis on the word "*began*;" secondly, there is none on the word "*Jesus*." The contrast is not that the former treatise related what *Jesus* began, and this relates what some other person or persons continued; but it is that the former treatise related what *Jesus began* to do and to teach; and this relates what he, the same *Jesus*, *continued* to do and to teach. — *Alford*. Thus the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are parts of one connected Life of our Lord — one his life in the body, the other his life in the Church. — *Abbott*.

2. **Until the day.** — The fortieth day after his resurrection (v. 3. See Luke 24: 51). — *Barnes*. **Had given commandment.** — The charge was doubtless just what is recorded in Mark 16: 15-18 and Luke 24: 44-49, particu-

apostles whom he had chosen; (3) to whom he also ²shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the king-

² Or, *presented*.

dom of God, (4) and, 'being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, *said he*, ye heard from me: (5) for John indeed bap-

⁴ Or, *eating with them*.

larly the great *ministerial* commission of Matt. 28: 18-20. — *J. F. & B.* **Through the Holy Ghost.** — These words may denote either the spiritual influence under which our Saviour's mediatorial acts were all performed, or the influence by which his last instructions were accompanied, and by which the apostles were enabled to obey them. The second explanation is more obvious and better suited to the context, which would lead us to expect, not a mention of the spiritual gifts which our Saviour had received, but of those which he bestowed on this occasion. — *Alexander.* **The apostles.** — The eleven that remained after the treason and death of Judas. — *Barnes.* They are here mentioned as a well-defined and well-known body of men, whose vocation and mission had already been recorded by this writer (Luke 6: 12-16). — *Alexander.*

3. **To whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion.** — Literally, *after he had suffered.* The English somewhat anticipates the later special sense of "passion." — *Ellicott.* **Many proofs.** — He gave them many signs and evidences that it was He himself, the Crucified One, whom they saw, and not another, and that He lived indeed, — evidences that appealed to the eye, the ear, and the touch. — *Lange.* **Appearing unto them.** — Allowing himself to be seen, not continuously, but at intervals, when he pleased and as he pleased. — *Cook.* **Speaking.** — Not merely talking, but authoritatively teaching and declaring. **The kingdom of God.** — Denoting in its widest sense the Church under all its forms and dispensations, and including therefore the Theocracy or Jewish Church, but here referring more especially, no doubt, to the Messiah's kingdom, or the new form under which the Church, or chosen people, was about to be reorganized. — *Alexander.*

4. **He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem.** — Why? Because it was God's high purpose to *glorify the existing economy*, by causing His Spirit to descend upon the disciples at its ancient seat, and on the occasion of the very first of its annual festivals after the ascension of the Church's Head; so fulfilling the sure word of prophecy, "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2: 3, with which compare Luke 24: 49). — *J. F. & B.* **Promise of the Father.** — So called because predicted in the Old Testament as from God (Joel 2: 28). — *Whedon.* **Ye heard from me.** — The reference is to something said before that last interview, and so must be to those explicit promises of the Spirit which were made to the disciples at the Supper-table the night before he suffered (see John 14: 16, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7-11). — *J. F. & B.*

5. **For John indeed baptized, etc.** — John the Baptist. Jesus evidently has reference to what was said of John's baptism compared with

tized with water; but ye shall be baptized ⁵with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

(6) They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? (7) And he said unto them, It is not for

you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath ⁶set within his own authority. (8) But ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part

⁵Or, in.

⁶Or, appointed by.

his own in Matt. 3:11; John 1:33. This promise was now about to be fulfilled in a remarkable manner (see Acts 2:2). Not many days hence. — This was probably spoken not long before his ascension, and of course not many days before the day of Pentecost. — *Barnes*. Not many encouraged hope, and the indefiniteness induced watchfulness. — *Cook*.

6. Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? — More literally, *art thou restoring*. . . . Before the Passion the disciples had thought that "the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). Then had come the seeming failure of these hopes (Luke 24:21). Now they were revived by the Resurrection, but were still predominantly national. Even the Twelve were thinking, not of a kingdom of God, embracing all mankind, but of a sovereignty restored to Israel. — *Ellcott*. The question shows neither an absolute misapprehension of the nature of Christ's kingdom, nor a perfectly just view of it, but such a mixture of truth and error as might have been expected from their previous history and actual condition. That the kingdom of Israel was to be restored they were justified in thinking by such prophecies as Isa. 1:26; 9:7; Jer. 23:6; 33:15, 17; Dan. 7:13, 14; Hos. 3:4, 5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 9:9. They were only mistaken, if at all, in expecting it to be restored in its primeval form. — *Alexander*.

7. It is not for you to know times or seasons. — Not "*the times or seasons*" (A.V.) of this one case merely, but *times or seasons* generally, that they were forbidden to pry into. — *Alexander*. The *times* are the succession of ages, greater or less in length, over which the history of the Church should extend before the end comes; the *seasons* are the successive phases of development, through and by means of which it would grow to its development. It is not in man either to know the length of time, or to understand beforehand the *necessary processes of growth*; it is his simply to perform the duty allotted to him, *leaving* the great movement of which he is a part, and to which he contributes, to be unfolded by God. — *Abbott*.

8. Ye shall receive power, etc. — The word *power* here refers to the help or aid which the Holy Spirit would grant: the power of speaking with new tongues; of preaching the gospel with great effect; of enduring great trials, etc. See Mark 16:17, 18. — *Barnes*. Ye shall be my witnesses. — They were to be witnesses of all that they had seen and heard from the beginning of their intercourse with Christ (John 15:27; Luke 24:18), his doctrines, miracles, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. (See v. 22; chap. 2:32; 10:39, 41; 22:15; 26:16). — *Alexander*. Jerusa-

of the earth. (9) And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up: and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: (11) which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking

into heaven? this Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.

(12) Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off.

lem . . . Judea . . . Samaria . . . uttermost parts of the earth. — Observe the widening circle. Compare Luke 24: 47; Matt. 28: 19, 20; and contrast with the earlier commission (Matt. 10: 5). By *uttermost* both time and space are included; to the remotest corners of the earth, to the remotest period of time. — *Abbott*.

9. And when he had spoken, etc. — No other passage of the Scriptures exhibits this event so fully and distinctly as the present. The ascension consisted of two parts: the Lord was, first, visibly taken up, so that the apostles could follow him for a short time with their eyes as he rose on high; then a cloud (probably a bright cloud, Matt. 17: 5), passing beneath received him, and thus removed him from their view. — *Lange*.

10. While they were looking steadfastly into heaven. — Following him with their eager eyes in rapt amazement. This is stated as part of that resistless evidence of their senses on which their whole subsequent testimony was to rest. — *J. F. & B.* They gazed not only at but into heaven, as if to penetrate its secrets and discern their now invisible Redeemer. — *Alexander*. Two men. — Men in form, *angels* in nature, or at least in office. See Luke 24: 4. Stood by, without having visibly come there. — *Whedon*.

11. Ye men of Galilee. — This address indicates that only the eleven were present, all of whom were Galileans. — *Abbott*. This same Jesus. — Clothed in human nature, shall so come in like manner — with the same body, *descending* from heaven by his own sovereign and all-controlling power, as ye beheld him going into heaven. — *Clarke*. So our Lord, following the great prophecy of Dan. 7: 13, had spoken of himself as "coming in the clouds of heaven," in visible majesty and glory. Matt. 24: 30, 31; 26: 64. — *Ellicott*.

12. Mount called Olivet. — The hills or ridge east of Jerusalem separated from the city by the Kidron Valley (Zec. 14: 4; Ezek. 11: 23). Its name is derived from the olive-trees which once abounded on its sides (Neh. 8: 5). — *Whitney*. Sabbath day's Journey. — A space of 2,000 cubits [about three-quarters of an English mile], the extent to which the Jews were allowed, by the tradition of the elders, to leave home upon the Sabbath. The measure is supposed to have been borrowed from the space between the people and the ark when they passed over Jordan (Josh. 3, 4). The distance seems to be here stated only for the purpose of conveying the idea that the Mount of Olives was not far from the city. — *Alexander*.

(13) And when they were come in, they went up into the upper chamber, where they were abiding; both Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus,

¹Or, *brother*; See Jude 1.

and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the ²son of James. (14) These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, ³with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

²Or, *with certain women*.

13. **The upper chamber.** — In the Scriptures the “upper chambers” were places in that part of the house which was farthest removed from the ground, set apart by the Jews for private prayer, looking towards the temple of Solomon or its site; which, on account of their consecration and suitable privacy, were used by the apostles for Christian purposes. — *Gregory*. The room may have been the same as that in which the Paschal Supper had been eaten. — *Ellicott*. **Where they were abiding.** — This does not mean that this was their *permanent* habitation; but they remained there waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit. — *Barnes*. **Peter and John, etc.** — The names of the eleven apostles are here given in full at the commencement of the narrative, for the purpose of placing those in a prominent position who constituted the central point of the Church of Christ, and to whom personally the promise of the Spirit had been given. — *Lange*. For the life and character of the apostles, see Part I., 1882, Lesson VI., pages 55, 56.

14. **With one accord.** — The word rendered *with one accord* is composed of two Greek words signifying unity in fervor or zeal. For meaning see Acts 7: 57; 12: 20; 18: 12; 19: 29. See also Exod. 19: 8; Jer. 46: 21. Their unity was not their intellectual accord, but their spiritual earnestness of desire for the divine blessing. — *Abbott*. **Continued.** — During the ten days to the feast of Pentecost. — *Whedon*. **With the women.** — The strict translation is, *with women, i. e.,* with women as well as men; these services were limited to neither sex. — *Alexander*. Probably those who ministered to Jesus in Galilee (Luke 8: 3), and were with him at the cross (John 19: 25), and at the sepulchre (Mark 16: 1). — *Abbott*. **Mary the mother of Jesus.** — She is not again mentioned in the New Testament. — *Lange*. **With his brethren, or his brothers,** probably the same who accompanied his mother upon several remarkable occasions in the Gospel History (John 2: 12; Matt. 12: 46-50; Mark 3: 31-35; Luke 8: 19-21), and would therefore seem to have been members of her household. Beyond this, who his brethren were has been a subject of dispute for ages. — *Alexander*. They were not believers in Christ in his earlier ministry (John 7: 5), and John 19: 25, 26, indicates that they were not so at the time of his crucifixion. That the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection were the means of their conversion is a reasonable hypothesis. — *Abbott*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — With this lesson we enter, not upon a new history, but upon a continuation of that which has engaged

our attention for a year past. The Gospels and the Acts alike record the works of Christ, the former setting forth what he did in person while he was here; and the latter what he did by the agency of his Spirit, and the ministry of his apostles, after his ascension. Hence Luke opens this second part of his narrative with an allusion to his "former treatise" "concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up." The word "began," as here used, is not redundant, but emphatic. It signifies that the work of Jesus, in his personal ministry, was initiatory—was only a beginning. It was to be continued by him and carried to its consummation after his ascension. Of this continuation, Luke is now about to write the history, and, as might be expected, he begins by referring again to the events with which his first narrative had concluded.

Lesson Topics.—I. Our Lord's Resurrection Ministry. II. His Final Words. III. His Ascension.

I. OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION MINISTRY (vs. 1-5).—Like all other men, Jesus died; but, unlike any other man, having come forth from the tomb, he resumed his personal ministry on earth. In our lesson this ministry is briefly presented—

1. *In its reality* (v. 3). He showed himself in such ways and under such circumstances that there could be no doubt of his real presence. In fact the disciples never did doubt it after the ascension. Ten of these appearances are mentioned in the New Testament. (1) His appearance to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16: 9-11; John 20: 11-18). (2) To the other women on their way back to the city (Matt. 28: 9, 10). (3) To Simon Peter (Luke 24: 34; 1 Cor. 15: 5). (4) To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16: 12, 13; Luke 24: 13-35). (5) To the disciples when Thomas was not present (Luke 24: 36-49; John 20: 19-23). (6) To the disciples eight days later when Thomas was with them (Mark 16: 14; John 20: 24-29). (7) To the seven at the Sea of Galilee (John 21: 1-22). (8) To the apostles and above five hundred disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Mat. 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 15-18; 1 Cor. 15: 6). (9) To the apostle James (1 Cor. 15: 7). (10) To all the apostles at his ascension (Mark 16: 19; Luke 24: 50-53). Thus he "shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days." As the faith of the whole Church depends absolutely on the resurrection of our Redeemer, it pleased the Lord to give the most ample evidence of the fact. We enter into no speculation as to the nature of the resurrection life of Jesus. He had a body; it was not simply a spiritual appearance; nor was it his glorified body, for he spoke of having "flesh and bones," and being identically what he was before. Still, he came forth to another kind of life, and had a body fitted by certain properties to that life. He was capable of eating, he could do it and did it; but he needed not to do it. Where he lived we do not know, nor what he did. He did not appear in the streets of Jerusalem, nor in the courts of the Temple, as formerly. He

was not seen in the world as he was before his death, but he was there to be seen by his disciples when, and as often as it was needed.

2. *In its theme* (v. 3). His ministry, like his life, was different in those forty days from what it had been before. In his previous ministry there was precept and parable, and he poured out fervent utterances like an old prophet. But all the while he was preparing for the consummation of his redemptive work on the cross, and he could not say much of its meaning before it had been accomplished; but when it was completed, then he began to speak of it. It is no longer parables, and sermons on the mount, and denunciations of the Pharisees. His ministry was now to open up to the minds of the apostles the things in the Scriptures concerning himself; to do what he could not do before he died — explain the meaning of that death and its relation to "the kingdom of God." Their question just before he left them (v. 6) betrays their ignorance of the spirituality and universality of that kingdom. For them, even now, it is a material empire which is to appear at once and restore Israel to more than her ancient power and glory as a nation. Our Lord's teaching in the interviews of those forty days would naturally seek to correct their error and lead them to a truer conception of the nature of his kingdom.

3. *In its aim* (vs. 4, 5). The purpose of this second ministry, this link between the ministry of the past and that of the future, was to prepare them for *their* ministry in the world, as his representatives and co-workers, in prosecuting the mission which he had begun. With this end in view —

(a) He formally commissioned them. This was done probably on the occasion of our Lord's appearance on the mountain in Galilee, the eighth in the order given above. The terms of the charge are given (Matt. 28: 19, 20; Mark 16: 15-18; Luke 24: 45-49). It is alluded to in our lesson (v. 2) as a "commandment." This commission was grounded upon a magnificent assumption: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28: 18). This could not refer to that authority which had been his from the beginning as the Eternal Son, the equal of the Father; but to an authority *given*, in virtue of the sacrificial work just consummated, — the authority of the Mediator. Him, the God-Man, hath the Father highly exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour; and this princely authority is exercised in the interests of men. The world is ruled in relation to the cross. The ministers of Christianity are the heralds of the world's King. The charge commences with an authoritative command to "go" — teaching the disciples that theirs was to be an *active* mission, not a quiet expectation like that countenanced by Judaism. Such is ever our Lord's commission to his disciples. It rouses them from repose and ease, and commands them, "Go!" The commission authorized the apostles to make disciples, and our Lord subdivides the work into two branches, — the initiatory rite, and the subsequent education or teaching (Matt. 28: 19, 20). With this commission the disciples were to go forth.

(b) He prepared them for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Something was yet wanting to make the execution of his charge possible to his followers, and our Lord had added, "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This was enough. It was by his Spirit that this promise was to be fulfilled. Hence he now commands them not to depart from Jerusalem till they receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. They were to go into all the world, yet not at once, or unconditionally. The Saviour awakens their expectation by referring to the promises of the Father that he would impart his Spirit, which were recorded in their Scriptures (Isa. 44: 3; Ezek. 36: 25-27; Joel 2: 28-32), by reminding them of the word of John the Baptist, concerning the high prerogative of the one "mightier than" himself, whose forerunner he was (Luke 3: 16); and by recalling to their minds the fact that he had reiterated these promises in their hearing himself (John 14: 16, 17, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7, 13, 14).

II. OUR LORD'S FINAL WORDS (vs. 6-8).—These words were spoken to the apostles on the occasion of our Lord's last appearance, and just before his ascension. They are—

1. *Words of reproof* (vs. 6, 7). The old Jewish understanding of the Messianic prophecies still clung to these apostles, and their preoccupied minds failed to take in the truth concerning "the kingdom of God." We read between the lines of God's word as our own wishes or preconceptions prompt us; and so did they with the words of Christ. For it would seem that, when they put that question about restoring at this time the kingdom to Israel, they had some idea that such a restoration of their oppressed countrymen to their ancient independence and prosperity might turn out to be "the promise of the Father," of which he had been talking to them, or, at least, might coincide with it. Our Lord turns aside their curiosity with a word of reproof, which declares its futility. What the Father's designs were as to the future were points not for them. They had better work, and nearer hand. As when, long before, some one asked, "Are there few that be saved?" he somewhat sternly answered, "Strive to enter in;" so here again he calls them from an idle, meddling curiosity about future "times and seasons" to the duty of the present. It is a weakness which has not died out of the Church to this day.

2. *Words of encouragement* (v. 8). The rebuke is mingled with words of hope. In it Jesus brings the disciples back to his own former point, and renews to them his unapprehended promise. "But ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." In the case of these apostles this "power" would be twofold. First and chiefly, it would be spiritual—ability to suffer, endure, and labor for Christ's sake, and effectually to proclaim his truth. Then it would include the ability to work miracles in attestation of the truth; but this would be secondary and subordinate. In the former aspect the promise is of permanent and unimpaired value, and universal application; in the latter, it is temporary and local. Spiritual power

for all suffering and service may be had, under this promise, by any disciple in any age. The power to work miracles has never been in the Church since the time of the apostles. It ceased because the necessity for it ceased. This "power" was promised to the disciples for a specific purpose—that they might be "witnesses." Being saved, they were to be employed. This is the law of the kingdom. The promise indicates the method and field of their ministry. They are to begin at Jerusalem and go to the uttermost part of the earth. They were neither to seek distant spheres at first, nor to confine themselves always at home; but to carry the gospel into all the world as each country could be reached.

3. *Words of benediction* (Luke 24: 50, 51). This is not brought out here, but was recorded by Luke in his "former treatise." "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them." This is a fact too precious and significant to be overlooked. In Christ God came to this world. Not by his words only, but also in his life, he showed us the Father. Down to this very last act he reveals the infinite love and tenderness of God. .

III. OUR LORD'S ASCENSION (vs. 9-14). — From the Mount of Olives, in the vicinity of Bethany, forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended.

1. *The circumstances.* Christ met his disciples in Jerusalem, and, having led them to the place selected, "he was taken up" from their presence, and in their sight. This was necessary, for they were to be "witnesses" to the fact. "He was taken up" by Divine power. This must refer to his humanity. The man Jesus, who was born of Mary, was tempted of the devil, suffered, toiled, died, and rose again, was received up into glory. A cloud received him out of their sight, and the disciples stood gazing in bewildered surprise. They were brought to their senses by the voice of angelic messengers. The words of these heavenly visitors convey a gentle reproof: "Why stand ye looking into heaven?" as if they had said, "Do ye not yet understand what the Lord has been saying? Ye have work to do on the earth." Then they remind them of their Lord's return, when they must give an account of their stewardship, declaring that Christ shall certainly come again, and in some such manner as they have seen him go.

2. *The purposes.* Christ ascended that he might receive the reward of his work on the earth; that he might be invested with absolute power and dominion, and fully exercise his regal authority as Mediatorial King; that as High Priest he might intercede for men, sending forth his Spirit to renew, sanctify, strengthen and guide them here, while he prepared a place for them in his Father's house.

3. *The effect on the disciples* (vs. 12-14). They returned to Jerusalem (v. 12) "with great joy" (Luke 24: 52). Though Jesus has gone, and they are encompassed with danger, yet they rejoice. The message of the angels implied that there was a link still to bind their Master to the earth. His disappearance was not to be final. His work was not consummated. His

charge that they should wait at Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Ghost was thus invested with new and solemn meaning. They returned, therefore, to Jerusalem with joy, no longer doubting the importance of their own mission, or the glory of their Lord. Previously, voices had spoken from heaven, and glorified saints from heaven had waited upon him; but *now* heaven had received him. All dreams of an earthly kingdom vanished. The vision of an enthronement among the clouds—symbol of an endless and heavenly rule—had passed before them. Light was already breaking upon the question, once so perplexing, how he could go away and yet abide with them forever. With glad hearts they left the sacred mountain. Its memories of him, who, having prayed there, was now glorified, were profoundly suggestive. Not many days hence the promise is to be fulfilled, and, in the meantime, they are to wait at Jerusalem.

JAN. 14, 1883.]

LESSON II.

[ACTS 2:1-16.]

THE DESCENDING SPIRIT.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."—Verse 4.

TIME.—May, A.D. 30. **PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) And when the day of place. (2) And suddenly there Pentecost ¹ was now come, came from heaven a sound as they were all together in one of the rushing of a mighty

¹Gr. *was being fulfilled.*

1. **Day of Pentecost.**—This was one of the three great Jewish national festivals, when all the males were required to go up to Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16). It was called Pentecost (a word meaning *fiftieth*), because it was the fiftieth day from the sixteenth day of Nisan, the second day of the Passover.—*Abbott*. They were all together.—"All" here certainly includes more than the twelve Apostles, and very possibly refers to the "hundred and twenty" mentioned in chap. 1:15. Others think of all the believers then assembled in Jerusalem.—*Schaff*. In one place.—Doubtless in the upper room where the Apostles abode, and where the disciples had met for the election of Matthias (1:26).—*Cam. Bib.*

2. **Suddenly.**—This sound came *suddenly*, and could not therefore be referred to any natural external cause. It came from heaven, which may refer both to the sensible impression of a sound descending from above, and to its supernatural origin, as caused by God himself. A sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind.—This was not an actual

wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. (3) And there appeared unto them tongues ²parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. (4) And they were all filled with

the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

(5) Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under

¹ Or, *parting among them.* Or, *distributing themselves.*

wind, but merely a *sound*, which they could compare to nothing so well as to a vehement wind. The whirr was so loud as to be heard through the whole house. — *Schaff*. The wind in the sacred Scriptures is often put as an emblem of a divine influence. See John 3:8. It is *invisible*, yet *mighty*, and thus represents the agency of the Holy Spirit. — *Barnes*.

3. — *Appeared unto them.* — The audible sign was followed by one addressed to the sense of sight. *Tongues*, may be regarded as a metaphorical description of the natural appearance of all fire, as in Isa. 5: 24 (where the Hebrew has "tongues of fire," while the A. V. gives only "fire,") from which comes the classical figure of a lambent flame; but here there is moreover an evident allusion to a special miraculous resemblance, prefiguring the extraordinary gift that was to follow. — *Alexander*. *Parting asunder.* — Parting themselves off like streams from one source, like branches from one root. *Like as of fire.* — In outward appearance, though not fire. — *Denton*. The idea conveyed by the verb is that the flame-like tongues were distributing themselves throughout the assembly, and the result is expressed by what follows: *and it sat upon each one of them*. The intention of the writer is to describe something far more persistent than meteoric light or flashes of electricity. — *Cam. Bib.* *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.* — As the flame touched each head, every man received a consciousness of a new and mighty power, each one felt as man had never felt before — the presence and love of God. The ecstatic utterance of praise which followed was merely an outward sign of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. — *Schaff*. To be *filled* with anything is a phrase denoting that all the faculties are pervaded by it, engaged in it, or under its influence. — *Barnes*. *Began to speak with other tongues.* — According to the promise which Christ made to them before his ascension. Mark 16: 17. — *Denton*. *Other tongues* can only mean languages different from their own, and by necessary implication, previously unknown. — *Alexander*. Real, living languages, as is quite plain from what follows. The thing uttered — perhaps the same by all — was "the wonderful works of God" (v. 11), possibly in the language of the evangelical hymns of the Old Testament; at all events it is clear that the speakers themselves understood nothing of what they uttered. — *J. F. & B.* *Spirit gave them utterance.* — Their utterances were thus not under their own control, but under the control of the Holy Spirit. They were inspired in the strictest sense of the term. — *Gloag*.

5. *There were dwelling at Jerusalem.* — Both permanent residents and pilgrims who had come up to the feast are probably included. *Devout men.* — Literally, *circumspect*, i. e., toward God. They were prob-

heaven. (6) And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. (7) And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? (8) And how hear

we, every man in our own language, wherein we were born? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judæa and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, (10) in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from

ably those who, like Simeon, were sincerely devout and God-fearing men, and waiting for the appearance of the promised Messiah. — *Abbott*. From every nation under heaven. — The Jews at this time were scattered over the whole world, and doing business in all the more prosperous cities (Philo). Agrippa, in *Josephus*, says: "There was no nation upon earth which had not Jews among them." — *Schaff*.

6. And when this sound was heard. — Not a rumor, but the sound itself as of the rushing of a mighty wind which filled the house. It was heard no doubt over all the neighborhood. — *Schaff*. Probably over all Jerusalem. — *Alford*. The multitude came together. — Perhaps the sound issued from the house as a centre; or, on its occurrence, the disciples may have gone out to the streets and commenced speaking with tongues. — *Gloag*. Every man heard them speaking in his own language. — The meaning is, not that all the disciples spoke all the dialects, but that each one spoke in some one, so that all were heard. — *Abbott*.

7. Are not all these which speak Galileans. — Persons who know no other dialect save that of their own country. — *Clarke*. No doubt the twelve came more prominently forward than the rest, and in Jerusalem they had been known as Galileans before the crucifixion (Matt. 26: 69-73). — *Cam. Bib.*

8. Wherein we were born. — That is, as we say, in our native language; that which is spoken where we were born. — *Barnes*.

9, 10. Parthians, etc. — The names follow each other in a certain geographical order, beginning at the northeast, and then proceeding to the west and south. Parthians, Medes, Elamites. — These denote races adjacent to the Caspian Sea and all belonging to the ancient Persian empire. — *Alexander*. It was among these people that Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, settled the captive ten tribes. Mesopotamia. — The country between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Here the Jewish captives were left by Nebuchadnezzar, Judæa. — This name is introduced because Luke desired to enumerate all the languages spoken that day by the disciples. — *Schaff*. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia. — These were all countries within Asia Minor, Pontus lying in the northeast and forming, on the north, part of the shore of the Euxine. . . . By Asia in this verse, and everywhere else in the Acts, is meant the Roman Province known as Proconsular Asia. . . . Its capital was Ephesus, and in this district were the seven churches of the Apocalypse. — *Cam. Bib.* Egypt. — Luke passes to Africa. Great numbers of Jews

Rome, both Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretans, and Arabians, we do hear them speaking in our own tongues the mighty works of God. (12) And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? (13) But others mocking, said, They are filled with new wine.

(14) But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them, *saying*, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words. (15) For these are not drunken, as ye suppose; see-

resided in Egypt. The Greek Version of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint (LXX), had been prepared for them. **The parts of Libya about Cyrene.**—West of Egypt, Cyrene was a large city of Libya, a fourth part of whose population was Jews. **Sojourners from Rome.**—He passes to Europe.—*Schaff*. The Roman Jews dwelling (or then being) in Jerusalem.—*Alford*. **Jews and Proselytes.**—This has reference to all the countries contained in the catalogue. The proselytes were converts from heathenism who had been circumcised and kept the Law.—*Schaff*.

11. Cretes and Arabians.—Cretes are the inhabitants of the island of Crete in the Mediterranean, south of the Ægean sea. Arabians are such as were scattered throughout Arabia Petrea, south of Palestine. **Mighty Works of God.**—The word points distinctly to words of praise and not of teaching.—*Ellicott*.

12, 13. They were all amazed, and were perplexed.—That is, as to the significance of this phenomenon. **What meaneth this?**—Literally, *what will this be?* or, as we should say, *What is going to come of this?* **Others mocking said.**—Not others of the God-fearing men, already described, but others beside them. Among the crowd drawn together by the event were some hostile critics, who reviled.—*Abbott*. **Filled with new wine.**—Rather “sweet wine”; that is, not “new wine,” but wine preserved in its original state (which was done by various processes), and which was very intoxicating.—*J. F. & B.* The very nature of the case, as well as Peter’s answer, shows the charge to have been not merely that of drinking but of being drunk.—*Alexander*.

14. Peter, standing up with the eleven.—Peter, as usual, is the spokesman, acting no doubt by divine suggestion, and with the tacit acquiescence of his brethren.—*Alexander*. **Lifted up his voice.**—So that the thousands who stood before him might hear distinctly; his good conscience and joy of soul gave him confidence and strength.—*Lange*. **Spake forth unto them.**—The original implies a solemn and weighty utterance. **Ye men of Judæa, etc.**—Or, *men, Judæans*. The language here is like that of Antony. “Friends, Romans, countrymen.” The Judæans are those whose home is in Judæa; the sojourners at Jerusalem are those who have come up as pilgrims to the feast.—*Abbott*. **Give ear unto my words.**—The verb is an unusual one, and is found here only in the New Testament.—*Ellicott*.

15. The third hour of the day, extending from eight to nine o’clock in the morning, was the first of the three stated hours of daily prayer,

ing it is *but* the third hour of which hath been spoken ³ by the day; (16) but this is that the prophet Joel.

³ Or, *through*.

which coincided with the morning sacrifice (Exod. 29: 38-42; Num. 28: 3-8); the Israelites were not allowed by devout usage to partake of food and drink until this hour had expired, particularly, when the festivals occurred.— *Lange*.

16. **This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel.** — This is the *fulfilment* of that. — *Barnes*. Namely, the speaking with tongues. Joel predicted that after enduring heavy sufferings the people would be visited with a copious outpouring of the Spirit. The quotation is from Joel 2: 28-32, and agrees more nearly with the Greek translation (LXX) than with the Hebrew original. — *Schaff*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — For ten days the disciples, one hundred and twenty in number, assembled day by day in the upper room at Jerusalem, waiting for the fulfilment of the promise. Only a single incident of this period — the choice of Matthias (1: 15-26) — is recorded. The time was devoted to prayer, an exercise which, if not new in character, was new in object. It was prayer offered to God with faith in his ascended Son. It would appear, indeed, that once during this waiting at Jerusalem they offered prayer to the glorified Lord himself (1: 24, 25).

The Feast of Pentecost had with the Jews a twofold import, being a feast of thanksgiving and of commemoration. It was originally designed as a grateful recognition of God's goodness upon the completion of the grain harvest. The historical import, as commemorative of the giving of the law on Sinai, which occurred seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt, rests mainly upon rabbinical traditions; for there is no certain trace of this signification either in the Old Testament or in the writings of Philo and Josephus. But the later Jews, founding their inference, most probably, on a comparison of Exod. 12: 2 with Exod. 19: 1, were accustomed to regard the feast as having an historical import, and it was commonly called the Feast of the Joy of the Law. Under both aspects, however, the giving of the Holy Ghost on this day was most fitting; for now were offered the first fruits of the Gospel harvest, and now the law of the Spirit of Life was written upon fleshly tables of the heart. This sense of fitness is heightened when it is remembered that the Pentecostal feast in this year fell on the first day of the week.

Lesson Topics. — I. The Descent of the Spirit. II. The Effects that Followed.

I. THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT (vs. 1-4). — On the morning of the great Day of Pentecost the disciples were early at the place of meeting. Before the first hour of prayer ("the third hour of the day," nine o'clock A.M.), "they were all together in

one place," and we may well believe that an intense expectation characterized them as they prayed and waited. Nor were they disappointed. And it is registered in letters of everlasting endurance, — a record, surely, for all times of discord and disruption, — that the most glorious manifestation of the Spirit of God yet vouchsafed to the world was afforded to a company of humble and unpretending believers, whose special distinction it was that they were assembled with one accord, and in one place, praying and waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

1. *The outward signs* (vs. 2, 3). These waiting disciples had grasped the promise, but they could have had little conception of how the answer would come, or what it would involve. It is to be presumed that they were full that morning only of a dim, vague longing for something, a blind going forward of the soul to meet they hardly knew what.

(a) "A sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind." That which we wait for most intently comes on us at the last as a surprise. "Suddenly" there rushed down upon the house, as if it fell out of a clear sky, a sound which was like nothing so much as the impetuous, furious blast of a gale, and which in an instant "filled all the house where they were sitting." There was no wind: had there been this outward phenomenon the event would have been far less astonishing. A sudden tempest was no extraordinary occurrence in Judæa. But all was still — there was no play of storm or wind, no roar of thunder or voice of earthquake; nothing was to be heard but the voice of prayer or the sigh of expectation, when in a moment the place was filled with this sound, which "came from heaven." The prayers of the disciples were directed to heaven, and from heaven came the answer.

(b) "Tongues parting asunder, like as of fire." Before the disciples could recover from the awe and astonishment with which the mysterious sound inspired them, there came a brightness, as of a fiery stream, which parted itself to each, so that each saw on every other's head a flame-like, tongue-shaped thing, which seemed to alight there and rest. We are not to suppose real fire on this occasion; nor that the "tongues" were in themselves *cloven*; they were so many distinct and flame-like shapes, severed or cloven from the main body. In this very severance there may have been a symbol, as if to teach that, though these may be diversities of gifts, there is but ONE SPIRIT. This sign indicated not only the fulfilment of the promise, but the nature of the duty which that fulfilment laid upon the disciples. They were to be "witnesses" — to speak for their Lord. Nor was this duty confined to the apostles. The fiery tongue "sat upon each one of them" — men and women alike. All who have experienced his saving power are under obligations to be witnesses for Christ. No one need be afraid, none ought to be ashamed, to speak for the honor of his name.

These were material signs, audible to the ear or visible to the eye, which told of the advent and the presence of God. The

elements are his servants. They herald his coming. They proclaim his presence (Heb. 1:7). Yet here, as of old (1 Kings 19: 11-13), it is not in the wind nor in the fire that the Lord is. Behind these material signs, which were designed to startle the stupid hearts of men into an apprehension of the divine, we must look for the Lord himself.

2. *The inward gift.* "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Invisible as the breath from which he borrows his human name, penetrating as the flame to which he likens his working, the Holy Spirit comes into the human spirit of each waiting believer in that company, purifying, quickening, illuminating, and inspiring them all, till the tide of celestial emotion flows out in rapt, ecstatic, passionate utterance of jubilant praise. Here is the true inner wonder of that day. This is the very heart of the events of Pentecost. The promise of the Father was fulfilled. This was not the first descent of the Spirit; for in earlier times the heart of man had been the seat of Divine indwelling and inspiration. But prior manifestations did not realize all that is implied in being "filled with the Holy Spirit." It is true that the same expression is used in reference to some of the servants of God who lived before this Pentecostal visitation; but it must be understood in a modified sense. This baptism was, emphatically, the gift of the Father in attestation of the mission of his Son; the inauguration of a new era in the spiritual life of man. And it is a fact of deep significance that this *beginning* of the realization of the Gospel power was characterized by **FULNESS**. The fountain-head was a sea.

II. THE EFFECTS WHICH FOLLOWED (vs. 5-16).—These effects were, as might be expected, very marked. They were of two classes.

1. *The Miraculous.* They "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That is, the disciples were gifted with the power of speaking in languages new to them. It is impossible to avoid this conclusion, when immediately we read (vs. 5-11) that each one of those who had come from the various nations under heaven heard them speak in his own language. The purpose of this miraculous endowment was not, as has been commonly supposed, to enable the apostles to preach the Gospel. It was not needed for this purpose. In all the countries which we read that the apostles visited Greek was commonly understood. All the Epistles are written in that language, even that to the Galatians, who were as likely to be ignorant of it as any. There is no record of such use of the gift. Even here on the day of Pentecost it is clear that the apostles did not preach in foreign tongues. When the time came to preach the Gospel to the multitude, Peter came forward and addressed them all at once, of course in one language—doubtless the Greek, for his quotations from the Old Testament are almost *verbatim* from the Septuagint Greek translation—a circumstance which cannot be reasonably accounted for in any other way. The gift of tongues was used, not for

preaching, but for praise. What the disciples uttered in the various languages was "the wonderful works of God" (v. 11). So the converted Gentiles, when the Spirit fell on them, were heard to "speak with tongues, and magnify God" (Acts 10: 46). Probably the utterer did not understand his own utterances, or, would not have understood had he heard them from the lips of another. Those who spoke with tongues at Corinth were not understood, obviously because there were no foreigners present, as there were in this case, to recognize their own languages. Accordingly the one so inspired spoke not to men, but to God, he edified himself by the utterance in *any* way of his heart's emotions, but he did not edify the church; hence speaking with tongues was a lower gift than prophecy (1 Cor. 14: 2-5). This gift of tongues was the result of an occasional sudden impulse of supernatural inspiration, and was not to be used at the will of the individual, — they spake "as the Spirit gave them utterance." It was "for a sign not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving" (1 Cor. 14: 22). It was designed to compel attention to and authenticate the message of the first preachers of Christianity. It was extraordinary, and ceased with the first generation, because it was no longer needed. An undue prominence has frequently been given to this phenomenon, as though it were the most important feature of the Pentecostal baptism; whereas the grand fact of the day was that all were filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. *The Spiritual.* The sound with which the descent of the Spirit was accompanied was heard throughout Jerusalem (v. 6), and a vast crowd speedily gathered. Each one hears his own language from one or other of the disciples. Persian, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Coptic, Latin, are all mingled. The astonishing news flies throughout the city. Soon the house is surrounded by many thousands. "What meaneth this?" is the general exclamation. Some look on with solemn awe; others, mocking, say, "These men are full of new wine."

At this juncture, the point at which the Gospel is transferred to human agency, Peter, standing forth with the eleven, not in the room, but most probably in an open space outside the house, lifted up his voice and addressed the people. Refuting the charge of drunkenness with the popular and conclusive argument that it was then but the third hour of the day, before which time it was not usual for the Jews either to eat or drink, he passes on to claim the extraordinary event of the day as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel; the grand feature of which was the *universal* pouring out of the Spirit, and not a restricted effusion, as heretofore. It was a wonderful sermon, about which more must be said in our next lesson. It is enough here to say that it was, perhaps, among the greatest miracles of the day. Nothing less than a supernatural endowment could have furnished the untutored Peter for such an effort.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." This is the great central truth of Pentecost. To be thus "filled" is the privilege of every believer (Acts 6: 3; 11: 24). It may be secured

by each just as these disciples secured it—by an obedient and prayerful waiting on God for the fulfilment of his promise. And the spiritual effects which follow the realization of this fulness are, unlike the miraculous, permanent and universal. Something of these effects may be seen in the spiritual changes wrought in those by whom the Holy Spirit was now received in his fulness. With his reception by these disciples there came to them—

(a) *Spiritual illumination.* They had received a measure of the Spirit long before this, but not such as to preclude dimness of spiritual vision. Down to the very last they could not comprehend Christ's teaching concerning the true nature of the Kingdom he came to establish. They were utterly confounded by his humiliation and death; and in his very latest interview with them he found it necessary to reprove them for a question based upon their misapprehension of his instruction. But from this time forth they display a spiritual discernment which saves them from any such misunderstanding. If we would see clearly alike our duty and our privilege we must be filled with the Spirit. Like fire, he illuminates.

(b) *Spiritual purification.* We cannot trace the course of these disciples, so far as it has been made known to us, without clearly perceiving that any measure of the Spirit they may have received before this did not save them from very great spiritual infirmity, which was evidenced by acts which make us wonder if they belonged to Christ at all. The best of them yielded to intense vindictiveness (Luke 9: 54), unworthy ambition (Matt. 20: 20-28), and cowardly inconstancy (Matt. 26: 69-75). But with the fulness of the Spirit such things disappear. They are henceforth new men. Their record is blotted by no such lapses. The Christ-like is developed in their characters and expressed in their lives. Such effects follow the reception of the Spirit's fulness still. Like fire, he purifies.

(c) *Spiritual inspiration.* This appears in the courage of these disciples. For instance, the fact that Peter was the spokesman on this occasion is not to be accounted for on the ground of his natural ardor and impetuosity; it has a profounder significance. This is the Peter who denied his Master with oaths and curses but a few weeks before. *Then*, a maid-servant put all his courage to flight; *now*, being baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, he is not dismayed by thousands; but with sublime self-possession he proclaims Jesus and the resurrection. So much is it to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." This spiritual inspiration appears also in the assurance and triumphant joy of these men. These take the place of doubt and darkness in their experience. So it will ever be. To be brave and blessed—full of courage and full of consolation, we must be "filled with the Holy Spirit." Like fire, he warms and cheers.

JAN. 21, 1883.]

LESSON III.

[ACTS 2:37-47.]

THE BELIEVING PEOPLE.

GOLDEN TEXT. — “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.” — Verse 41.

TIME. — May, A.D. 30. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(37) Now when they heard *this* they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? (38) And Peter *said* unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall

37. When they heard this. — This declaration of Peter, and this *proof* that Jesus was the Messiah (vs. 16-35). — *Barnes*. They were pricked in their heart. — Not necessarily all who heard; but at least, the three thousand. — *Schaff*. The word translated *were pricked* is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. It properly denotes to pierce or penetrate with a needle, lancet, or sharp instrument; and then to pierce with grief, or acute pain of any kind. It answers precisely to our word *compunction*. In this case it means that they were suddenly and deeply affected with anguish and alarm at what Peter had said. — *Barnes*. Stung with remorse at the enormity of the wickedness which had been committed in the Crucifixion, and at the blindness with which the whole nation had closed their eyes to the teaching of the prophecies which had spoken of the Messiah. — *Cam. Bib.* **Said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles.** — The meeting now evidently broke up into fragments, *personal conversation with inquirers following the public sermon.* — *Abbott*. **Brethren.** — This friendly, courteous address showed how already the people's hearts were moved. — *Cook*. **What shall we do?** Their desperate perplexity was well expressed by the question, *What shall we do? i.e., what ought we to do, as a matter of duty, and what must we do, as a means of safety?* — *Alexander*.

38. Repent ye, and be baptized. — Two distinct acts are required, one inward and one outward. The first verb, according to its etymology and classical usage, denotes afterthought, reflection, and then, by a natural association, change of mind, including both the judgment and the feelings. In the Greek of the New Testament it is applied to change of mind in reference to moral good and evil, and more especially to one's own character and conduct. Regret or sorrow is only one of its ingredients. Evangelical repentance, in its widest sense, is an entire revolution of the principles and practice of the heart and life. The change of mind required was to be attested by an outward act. *Repent and be baptized.* — *Alexander*. The rite of baptism was well known to the Jews; had been practised by John the Baptist and the disciples (John 4:1, 2), and commanded by Christ (Matt. 28:19). — *Schaff*. In the

receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (39) For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our

God shall call unto him. (40) And with many other words words he testified, and he exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked

name of Jesus Christ, is not the formula by which they were to be baptized, and therefore different from the one prescribed by Christ himself (Matt. 28:19), but a description of the rite as Christian, and not merely Jewish, much less heathen, baptism, or an unmeaning form, connected with no religious creed whatever. *In the name of Christ, i.e.*, by his authority, acknowledging his claims, subscribing to his doctrines, engaging in his service, and relying on his merits. — *Alexander*. **Unto the remission of your sins.** — Not merely, as Dr. Hackett, "in order to the forgiveness of sins," but, *for the putting away of sins*, the entire cleansing of the heart from actual sin, as well as the pardon of those that are past. (See Isaiah 1:18; Matt. 1:21; 1 John 1:9. — *Abbott*. **Ye shall receive . . . the Holy Ghost.** — The gift of the indwelling Spirit, of which tongues and other supernatural gifts were but the external attestations. — *J. F. & B.*

39. The promise — of the Holy Ghost, the grand blessing of the new covenant (Joel 2:28, 29), which was to descend upon the church from the risen and glorified Saviour (see John 7:37-39). — *J. F. & B.* **To you . . . and to your children.** Just as "to Abraham and his seed were the promises made" (Gal. 3:16), so is it to be under the new covenant. — (*Am. Bib.* **And** — next after you (for the rule was, "to the Jew first"), **to all that are afar off** — meaning the Gentiles, who are expressly so described in Isa. 57:19 (quoted in Eph. 2:13, 17). — *J. F. & B.* Some have questioned this meaning here, because Peter was subsequently surprised at the call of the Gentiles (chap. 10:28; 11:16, 17; Gal. 2:12), and others, not questioning the meaning, have doubted the fact that Peter uttered it. The difficulty is, however, purely imaginary. Not only the apostles, but also every pious Jew, expected the conversion of the Gentiles in great numbers; what surprised Peter, and what he and the other Jewish Christians were slow to believe, was that they were to be admitted to the Church of Christ without first becoming Jews (chap. 15:1). — *Abbott*. **As many as the Lord our God shall call unto him.** — That is, all to whom in the course of his providence and grace he shall send the preaching of Christ Crucified. — *Clarke*.

40. With many other words. — The words cited appear only to be the concluding summary of Peter's many exhortations. — *Alford*. **He testified, and exhorted.** — *Testified* as a witness to the truth of the promise of God, and *exhorted* as an ambassador from God (2 Cor. 5:20), to its immediate acceptance. — *Abbott*. **Save yourselves.** — The sense of the form here used is, *be saved, i.e.*, consent that God shall save you, **from** (the character and destiny of) **this crooked generation.** — *Alexander*. That is, from the Jewish people who had filled up the cup of their iniquity by the murder of Christ and were doomed to destruction. The word signifies moral and religious perverseness (Deut. 32:5; Phil. 2:15). — *Schaff*.

generation. (41) They then¹ that received his word were baptized; and there were added *unto them* in that day about three thousand souls. (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and² fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

(43) And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done³ by the apostles.⁴ (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common; (45) and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had

¹ Or, *having received*.

² Or, *in fellowship*.

³ Or, *through*.

⁴ Many ancient authorities add *in Jerusalem; and great fear was upon all*.

41. They then that received his word.—Accepted it as true; they testified to their acceptance by complying immediately with the external and visible condition, baptism. **Were baptized.**—Immediately, though not necessarily on the same day. The three thousand accept the truth at once, but time may have been taken necessary for the rite of baptism. How it was performed is not indicated in the narrative.—*Abbott*. **There were added.**—To the company of disciples, or to the followers of Christ. **Souls.**—Persons (comp. 1 Pet. 3:20; Gen. 12:5).—*Barnes*.

42. They continued steadfastly.—They persevered in, or they adhered to.—*Barnes*. **The apostles teaching.**—They naturally sought to know more and more of the sayings, deeds, and commandments of Jesus.—*Schaff*. **Fellowship.**—The original signifies literally a sharing in common. Here it probably implies both fellowship in spiritual things, a participation with each other in Christian sympathy and experience, and also practical charity—the sharing of goods with the poor indicated by v. 45.—*Abbott*. **In breaking of bread.**—St. Luke uses the phrase, we must remember, in the sense which, when he wrote it, it had acquired in St. Paul's hands. It can have no meaning less solemn than the commemorative "breaking of bread," of 1 Cor. 10:16.—*Ellicott*. **In prayers.**—Social prayers, and probably stated seasons for it.—*J. F. & B.*

43. Fear came upon every soul.—The general impression on the public mind. A feeling of awe was excited even among those who did not join the company of believers. **Many wonders and signs, etc.**—As, for example, the healing of the lame man (chap. 3).—*Schaff*. The term *wonders* refers to their effect on the minds of eye-witnesses; *signs*, to the purpose which they were intended to serve, as proofs of the divine mission.—*Cook*.

44. All that believed were together.—Not literally were in one place. No ordinary room, obtainable in Jerusalem, would have contained the three thousand. But they constituted a social community by themselves, separated from the rest of the people, not by local and physical barriers, but by their own mutual sympathies.—*Abbott*. **Had all things common.**—Common not by joint *ownership*, but by freedom of use.—*Whedon*. How they carried this out is expressed in the next verse.—*J. F. & B.*

45. Possessions and goods.—The term *possessions* signifies property acquired, the term *goods* simply that which belongs to one. Their

need. (46) And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart,

(47) praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added ^s to them day by day those that were being saved.

^s Gr., *together*.

property, whether acquired or inherited, was held subject to the claims of Christian charity. — *Abbott*. These verbs, *sold* and *parted*, are in the imperfect tense, indicating that the sale and distribution took place from time to time, as special occasions of distress or want called for them. — *Cook*.

46. Continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple — observing the stated forms of Jewish worship. **And breaking bread at home**, or, better still, in "private houses," or privately; in contrast with the publicity of the Jewish services, yet no doubt at some stated place or places of meeting. — *J. F. & B.* The essential fact is, that while they continued at this time in the observance of the Jewish forms of worship, they added gatherings for Christian worship in private houses. By "breaking bread," the observance of the Lord's supper is probably intended. — *Abbott*. **They did take their food**. — That is, their ordinary meals. — *Cam. Bib.* **With gladness and singleness of heart**. — These words describe the temper or the spirit in which all these acts and duties were performed, viz., *with gladness*, or rather *exultation*, the Hellenistic word here used being one of great strength, and *with singleness*, or *simplicity*, which seems to be the corresponding negative expression, by which every feeling is excluded that could mar this picture of exquisite but childlike happiness. The quality described is not mere sincerity, or freedom from hypocrisy, but singleness of purpose, aim and motive, as opposed not only to deceit, but to complexity of mind and character. — *Alexander*.

47. Having favor with all the people. — That is, with the great mass of the people; with the people generally. — *Barnes*. As it was said of Christ, "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37), so it seems to have been with his apostles. The first attack on them is (4:1) by the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees. — *Cam. Bib.* **Those that were being saved**. — This does not imply that salvation is a protracted process, but simply means that the saved were added to the church. — *Schaff*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — At the close of our last lesson we saw Peter standing up to preach to the multitude. After arresting the attention of his Jewish audience by a pointed quotation from the Old Testament (vs. 16-21), he leads them up to the Fountain-head of this miraculous effusion — Jesus of Nazareth. Reminding them of him whose mission had been divinely approved among them by miracles and wonders and signs, he

brings home the sweeping charge that they had been guilty of his death. But God had raised him up, as prophecy had foretold; the apostles had seen him, and were witnesses of this fact. And being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He, this same Jesus of Nazareth, had "poured forth this." The very Jesus whom they crucified was "both Lord and Christ" (vs. 22-36). This was the first sermon in the preaching of a completed redemption. It has three characteristics worthy of note: (1) It gives peculiar honor to the Old Testament Scriptures. The preacher falls back on the Psalms and the prophets, as on a sure support. All is grounded on the inspired word. (2) It is mainly a narrative of events to the reality of which the apostles were witnesses. This first preacher deals, not with philosophy, but with fact. He tells his story, and looks to God for the power. (3) Its grand theme is Christ. He calls up before his hearers the great events connected with Christ's mission on earth, and shows that in these the Scriptures find their fulfilment. It would be well if these characteristics were to be found in all our preaching and teaching to-day. In our lesson we have the effect of this first sermon.

Lesson Topics. — I. The Seeking Sinners. II. The Rejoicing Believers.

I. THE SEEKING SINNERS (vs. 37-40). — Many a more eloquent sermon than Peter's has been preached since that day; many a sermon as true to the facts and as cogent in its reasoning. But no other sermon, through all the centuries, has ever produced such widespread and blessed results. Those who listened —

1. *Were convicted of sin* (v. 37). This was the result of their listening to the truth, — "Now when they heard this," they began to feel and to act. The truth must be pressed home upon the mind, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10: 14). To be saved we must listen to the truth; to save others we must proclaim it. When the multitude "heard" the truth, as presented by Peter, "they were pricked in their heart." The word here translated "were pricked" is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It denotes to penetrate as with a needle, to pierce as with a sharp instrument. It answers to our word compunction, and expresses an agony of being, penetrating, intense, and sudden. The conviction of these was the first fulfilment of the Saviour's prophecy concerning the Holy Spirit, uttered just before his death, "And he, when he is come, will convict the world . . . of sin, because they believe not on me." It was not simply that the word of Peter pierced the hearts of his Master's murderers; for had that been all it would have stung them into rage, as did the words of Stephen to the Sanhedrin only a little later. But along with the word there came, on that first day of grace, the Spirit of God, whose office it is to arouse within the sinner the gracious relentings of a humble and sincere repentance. Under

his Divine operation the truth became mighty. The sense of their injustice, ingratitude, impiety, and exposure to the Divine displeasure pierced through "their heart." This is the first, and an essential step in the conversion of a soul. The truth, applied by the Holy Spirit, must have its appropriate effect — must produce conviction and compunction in the heart. The conscience must be aroused, and the sense of need brought home to the soul. No prodigal has ever returned until he became conscious of his *lost* condition. The physician is not sought until the disease is felt.

2. *They became anxious inquirers* (v. 37). Their compunction wrought in them anxiety; their conviction of sin the desire for direction, and they "said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?" Their question implies on their part —

(a) A belief that something was necessary to be done. In this they were not mistaken. Something must be *done* in order to salvation. While nothing can be done to *merit* eternal life, much must be done to *obtain* it. Though it is of grace, yet it is to be worked for, and although it is to be worked for, yet it is of grace. Hence the inquiry of these convicted sinners was intelligent and Scriptural. They felt their need of salvation, they knew that some means must be used to get it; and they asked, "What shall we do?"

(b) A readiness to do whatever was required. Whatever conditions were to be met, or sacrifices were to be made, they were prepared for. This is one of the most difficult steps in the salvation of men. To surrender absolutely to Christ, accepting without question and without reserve the conditions imposed by him, — nothing but the profoundest sense of need, joined to the conviction that Christ alone can meet his requirements, will ever lead a man to that. But there is no salvation without just this self-abnegation and entire submission. This is the rock upon which many a soul has been wrecked.

3. *They were not left without answer* (vs. 38-40). None ever are who inquire in the spirit here indicated. With characteristic promptness Peter responds to the appeal of the awakened seekers. His reply embraces —

(a) Direction (v. 38). They must repent of sin and confess Christ in baptism. There must be an internal act of renunciation of sin, and an external act expressing that renunciation. Repentance, in the New Testament sense, is such a sorrow for sin, not because of its awful consequences to ourselves, but because it is offensive to God, as leads to a resolute turning away from it. It means facing right round, away from old sin, towards new holiness. It involves a moral change of mind — a thorough revolution in life. It is not something imported from without, it is something produced from within. It implies profound reflection upon past conduct, the giving up of every known sin, and a fixed determination to pursue, for the future, the right way. As the term is here used by the apostle it implies and culminates in faith in Christ. Baptism is the external

symbol of this internal change, and for these seekers would be the most emphatic expression of the revolution wrought in them. Thus they would secure the blessings of which they stood in need. They needed "the remission of sins" — pardon for the past. There could be no advance toward a better life without this. A continued sense of guilt would prostrate the energies of the soul; make existence intolerable, as in the case of Judas, and sink it into everlasting despair. This burden must be removed before the soul can rise. Thank God, there are means to remove it. They needed not only pardon for the past, but Divine influence to energize them for the future; not only the remission of sins, but "the gift of the Holy Ghost." To these two things, the Divine pardon and the Divine Spirit, both essential to the salvation of man, Peter directs his sin-convicted hearers.

(b) Encouragement (v. 39). The very greatness of the privileges here opened up to them would, under the sense of their own unworthiness, stagger their faith. Hence the apostle assures them of the comprehensiveness of the Divine promise. He refers to the promise embodied in the prophecy of Joel to which he had just pointed them. This he declares for their encouragement was to them and their posterity, "and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him." On whom does he not call? His invitation is to all. This promise is a rainbow that encircles the world. The apostle continued to urge upon his hearers the immediate acceptance of these simple conditions (v. 40).

II. THE REJOICING BELIEVERS (vs. 41-47.) — The apostle's word was not without effect. About three thousand that day accepted the Saviour, and were admitted to his infant Church. They became disciples, that is, learners in the school of Christ. As such, they were characterized by —

1. *Perseverance* (v. 42). They were beset with difficulty, and had much to discourage and hinder them, "but they continued steadfastly" —

(a) "In the apostles' teaching." There were three particulars covered by the great commission which the Master gave his followers before his departure from among them (Matt. 28: 19, 20), they were to disciple, to baptize, and to teach all nations. The order of events here is precisely that enjoined. These had been discipled and baptized; there was now the third particular — the teaching — to be attended to. And these new disciples were anxious to learn. There was much for them to learn. They knew little as yet of the doctrine of their new master. It is still one mark of a true Christian that he continues steadfastly in the apostles' teaching. The work of salvation is not completed, only begun, when the disciple is baptized and received into the Church.

(b) "And in fellowship." That is, in the formation and fostering of that brotherly Spirit of Christian love which is involved in the "communion of saints." It was a thing to which they applied themselves with all the energy of a new

affection, this habit of fellowship or communion. They did not seek, each for himself, to live a life of pious meditation in the seclusion of their own hearts with God. They set themselves resolutely to live a life of fellowship. And this is the second mark of a true Christian.

(c) "In the breaking of bread." The reference here is to the Lord's Supper, which was celebrated by the early Church on their coming together every Lord's Day. They lived in obedience to their Lord's command, "This do in remembrance of me." From the very first it was understood that a Christian is one who observes all that Christ has commanded.

(d) "And the prayers." The prayers here designated are, most probably, certain services for prayer which were recognized amongst them. No doubt they prayed in secret,—no amount of public praying will supersede the necessity of that. But the particular place occupied by the word "prayers," in this connection, leads us rather to think of public than of private prayer; of the worship of the congregation rather than of the worship of the secret chamber. It was a fourth mark of a Christian then that he was constant at the meetings for common prayer. It is a mark of earnest Christianity still.

2. *Liberality* (vs. 44, 45). They "were together," not, perhaps, in one place, for no house could contain the multitude, but spiritually. They were one in spirit, they were together in soul. What one felt all felt. They could not bear to have while another wanted. They saw too clearly the meaning and reality of a Christian brotherhood to make it possible for them to be satisfied with giving thanks to God who "made them to differ," while that very difference involved in it distress and suffering to any for whom, as for them, their Master had died. Nothing but a real community of goods could satisfy the Christian instincts of that infant congregation. It was an example for all times, if not in form, yet in spirit.

3. *Gladness* (v. 46). They were a joyous community. All were happy in themselves, and happy in each other, because all were happy in God. Their gladness took the form of thankfulness. Gratitude is the grace that hallows gladness, and, by giving it an upward, Godward direction, renders it both noble and safe. The life of a Christian ought to be a happy life. The life of a true Christian will be a happy life. His very food has a blessing. He praises God over it. It is to him the token of a Father's love, the indication of a Father's hand.

4. *Usefulness* (vs. 43, 47). "Fear came upon every soul." This points to those who as yet believed not. The wonders wrought by the apostles, and, not less, the marvellous change wrought in those who had been so suddenly converted, startled the on-lookers, and prepared them in their turn to receive the truth. Then they were attracted by these changed lives. The new converts found "favor with all the people." Men often show their religion in the most unattractive, the most repulsive form, and then regard their own unpopularity as a proof of the world's hatred against religion. Let them exhibit their religion in its

aspect of a world-wide charity, and they will find it otherwise. They will find that while it inspires awe as God's witness, their religion wins love as the friend of man. There were daily additions to that infant church of "those that were being saved." Here is the model of Christian living for us all.

Three thousand souls in one day! And yet this was but the inauguration of Christianity. This was but the handful of corn on the top of the mountains. Pentecost was but an outline of things to come. But the Church has been satisfied that the day of Pentecost should be only historical. She has been content to regard this second chapter of Acts as a museum of spiritual curiosities. She has looked upon the story of the Spirit's descent very much as one looks upon the fossil fragment of a Mastodon,—a record of extinct life. While the Spirit has been ready to come as "floods upon the dry ground," she has been satisfied that his influence should be slowly and partially dealt out, here a *little*, and there a *little*. Advancement and expansion are the statute laws of the Gospel of God. The Christian world has been playing at religion. Being a child, it has spoken as a child, understood as a child, thought as a child; but every interest of humanity and every word of God calls upon it, in these latter days, to become a man, and to put away childish things.

JAN. 28, 1883.]

LESSON IV.

[ACTS 3:1-11.]

THE HEALING POWER.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."—Isa. 35:6.

TIME.—A.D. 30. **PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) Now Peter and John the ninth hour. (2) And a were going up into the temple certain man that was lame at the hour of prayer, *being* from his mother's womb was

1. Peter and John.—The personal friendship of these two disciples is illustrated by many incidents (Luke 5: 1-11; John 13: 23, 24; 18: 15, 16; 21: 7).—*Abbott.* **The hour of prayer, the ninth hour.**—The hours of public prayer at the Jewish temple were 9 A. M.; 12 noon; and 3 P. M. This last was "the ninth hour," reckoning as the Jews did, from six in the morning; and it was the hour of "the evening sacrifice," when a large number were wont to congregate at the temple (Luke 1: 10).—*J. F. & B.*

2. Lame from his mother's womb.—And he was now over forty years of age (ch. 4: 22). The nature of the lameness, a congenital weakness of the feet and ankles, is indicated by ver. 7.—*Abbott.* **Was carried.**—Literally, *was being carried*; not yet deposited in his usual place.

carried, whom they laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; (3) who seeing Peter and John about to

go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. (4) And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. (5) And he gave heed unto them, expecting to re-

—*Cook. Whom they laid daily.*—That is, his friends laid him there daily. He would therefore be well known to those who were in the habit of entering the temple. —*Barnes.* The practice of placing objects of charity at the entrances of temples, both on account of the great concourse and the supposed tendency of devotional feelings to promote those of a charitable kind, was common among Jews and Gentiles, and is still kept up in some parts of the Christian world. *At the door of the temple which is called Beautiful.*—No antiquarian research has yet succeeded in determining which gate of the temple or its area is here meant, or in accounting for the name here given to it. . . . The more common opinion is that the gate meant is the great eastern gate of the temple enclosure, corresponding to the entrance of the temple itself, and described by Josephus as superior in size and decoration to all the others, being wholly covered with Corinthian brass. The material fact here implied, if not expressed, is that this was the most frequented entrance to the temple, and was therefore chosen by the cripple, or his friends, as his place of habitual solicitation. —*Alexander.* *To ask alms.*—The giving of alms was a sacred duty insisted on strenuously in the law, and in connection with the religious offerings at the temple (Deut. 14: 28, 29; 15: 7, 11; 26: 12, 13). —*Abbott.*

4. *Peter . . . with John.*—This act, though formally affirmed of Peter only, the Greek participle being singular in form, is ascribed to both apostles by the words, *with John*, which indeed may be said of both the verbs, between which this parenthetic phrase is placed. —*Alexander.* *Said, Look on us.*—Not because he “wished to see his countenance in order to judge whether he was deserving of kindness” (*Meyer*), but simply to fix his attention, and awaken, even though vaguely, that spirit of the expectation and the obedience of faith, without which the cure could not have been wrought. Comp. with this look of the lame man that of the poisoned Israelite, in Num. 21: 8; both illustrate Isaiah 45: 22. Quarles interprets the two looks of Peter and the lame man: “When thou seest misery in thy brother’s face, let him see mercy in thine eye.” —*Abbott.*

5. *And he gave heed unto them.*—The sufferer, perhaps surprised at this unusual notice from a passer-by, gazed up at Peter and John with rapt attention, *knowing* he was about to receive some kindness. —*Schaff.* No avowal of faith was required in this case, or in that of *Aeneas* at Lystra. But the apostles were enabled to discern the faith of this cripple. Comp. 14: 9. He had faith (v. 16), was thankful for his cure (v. 9), and attached himself to the apostles (v. 11), even at his peril. Chap. 4: 14. —*Cook.* *Expecting to receive something.*—This expectation is generally a condition of receiving (Matt. 7: 7, 8), but the gift exceeds the expectation (Eph. 3: 20), as it did here. Observe the illustration of two phases of faith; in the apostle, a clear knowledge of the benefit to

ceive something from them. (6) But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. (7) And he took him by the right hand, and

raised him up: and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength. (8) And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and

be conferred, and of the Divine power of him by whom it would be conferred; in the lame man, only a confidence in the charity of the two unknown, and a vague hope of *something*, he knew not what. But there was faith in both, in each according to the measure of knowledge. — *Abbott*.

6. **Silver and gold have I none.** — Not, *I have none with me now*, nor *I have none to give to thee*, nor, literally, *I have none*, for though Peter had left all to follow Christ (Matt. 19:27), he was not a mendicant: but, *silver and gold is not for me to give, i.e.*, it is not my means for doing good. He speaks not for himself only, but also for John. — *Abbott*. **What I have, that give I thee.** — We are nowhere told how much time had passed since the day of Pentecost, and it is probable that this was not the first miracle which Peter wrought (see 2:43). For he speaks as not without experience of what works God will enable him to do. His language is that of firm assurance, "what I have," though in a moment he adds: **In the name of Jesus Christ.** — *Cam. Bib. Comp. chap. 4:10*. In Mark 16:17, 18, it is said, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils . . . they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." The expression means by his *authority*, or in *virtue of power derived from him*. **Of Nazareth.** — This was the name by which he was commonly known. By this name he had been designated among the Jews and on the cross. It is by no means improbable that the man had heard of him by this name, and it was important that he should understand that it was by the authority of him who had been crucified as an impostor. — *Barnes*.

7. **Took him by the right hand**, etc. — In this, as in many of our Saviour's miracles, the healing word was attended by an outward act or gesture, serving to connect the miraculous effect with the person by whom it was produced. (See Matt. 8:15; 9:25; 14:31; 20:34. Luke 7:14). — *Alexander*. **His feet.** — Better, *his soles*. The precision with which the process is described is characteristic of the medical historian. Both this term and the "ankle-bones" employed are more or less technical, as is also the word rendered "received strength," literally, *were consolidated*, the flaccid tissues and muscles being rendered firm and vigorous. — *Ellicott*.

8. **And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk.** — There is no hesitation in the man's manner; he does not question the power, but obeys at once. — *Cam. Bib.* The verb is a compound form of that in the LXX. version of Isa. 35:6 — "The lame man shall leap as a hart." First, there was the upward leap in the new consciousness of power; then the successful effort to stand for the first time in his life; then he "began to walk," and went on step by step; then the twofold mode of

praising God. (9) And all the people saw him walking and praising God; (10) and they took knowledge of him that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at

that which had happened unto him.

(11) And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the¹ porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

¹Or, *portico*.

motion, what to others was the normal act of walking, alternating with the leaps of exuberant joy. And so he entered with them into the temple. — That is, into the Court of Women, upon which the Beautiful Gate opened. At this hour, the hour of the evening sacrifice, it would be naturally filled with worshippers. — *Ellicott*.

9. **And all the people saw him walking.** — He was fully identified by the people as the helpless beggar. The news of this notable miracle spread through the city (Acts 4: 16), and the authorities could not deny the evidence. This cripple was forty years old when he was healed (Acts 4: 22), and his case had been looked upon as incurable. — *Schaff*.

10. **They took knowledge of him . . . and they were filled with wonder and amazement.** — Luke says, not only that it was the same man, but that *they knew* or *recognized* him as the same. The other clause describes the natural effect of this unhesitating recognition. The sight of this man walking, in the free use of his limbs, and loudly thanking God for his recovery, excited feelings of the highest wonder, not unmingled with awe, at this indication of God's special presence and activity among them. — *Alexander*.

11. **Held Peter and John.** — The word *held* means that he *adhered* to them; he joined himself to them; he was desirous of remaining with them and participating with them. — *Barnes*. He clung to his benefactors and would not be separated from them. — *Hackett*. **Ran together.** — Collected in a dense crowd. — *Whedon*. **In the porch that is called Solomon's.** — This porch or cloister was on the eastern side of the court of the Gentiles, and was built on an artificial embankment which was the work of King Solomon. It was in this cloister that the traffic of the money-changers was carried on. According to Lightfoot, the whole court of the Gentiles was spoken of popularly at times, as Solomon's Porch. — *Schaff*. **Greatly wondering.** — And thus was Peter again furnished with a vast audience, whose wonder at the spectacle of the healed beggar clinging to his benefactor prepared them to hearken to his words. — *J. F. & B.*

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — The principle running through these sacred records is that of selection rather than historical completeness. Hence the various incidents recorded are to be regarded as examples rather than exceptions among the works of the primitive Church. Among the many acts of healing done

in those first days by apostolic hands (2:43), this one at the Beautiful gate alone is told at length. We cannot definitely tell what time elapsed between the events of our last and those of this lesson. It is evident, however, that the excitement of the Pentecost had subsided, that the Church had settled down in quiet, and had in a measure ceased to draw public attention to itself. Several months must have elapsed, we should say, since the wonderful events which followed immediately the gift of the Spirit.

Lesson Topics.—I. The Lame Man. II. His Miraculous Cure.

I. THE LAME MAN (v. 2).—His story is told by Luke with his wonted and inimitable grace and simplicity, and with great minuteness of detail. Our attention is directed—

1. *To his condition.* He had been lame from his birth, and was now “more than forty years old” (4:22). He had never been able to walk through congenital weakness of the ankle-joints, and was entirely helpless. There was not even enough of strength in his feet to allow him to move about with the aid of crutches. He was obliged to be “carried,” like an infant, from one place to another. As a sad result of his helplessness, probably, he was in deep poverty. He is so poor that he is a beggar—dependent upon the chance pittance of charity for the supply of his bodily needs. His lameness has made him poor, and his poverty a beggar. It would be difficult to imagine a more pitiable condition. The man’s poverty must have seemed as nothing compared to the physical disability which was its cause. Those have little cause to complain, but, on the contrary, much cause for gratitude, who are in the possession of all their powers in healthful exercise. What man is there moaning over his ill-fortune, and mauding about his struggles, cares, and miseries, who would buy wealth, if it were laid at his feet, by the loss of sight, of hearing, or on condition of being crippled and helpless for life? It would do us good when we complain against Providence, if God compelled us to make the exchange for a while, and try how we liked a splendid paralysis, a gilded deafness or blindness, a luxurious dyspepsia, a domain of multiplied acres, and crippled or shrivelled limbs. Oh! what prayers would rise to heaven for poverty again, with the use of every faculty—that is, the freedom of God’s great world.

2. *To his position.* He was “laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful.” This was that central gate on the eastern side which led from the outer court, open to Gentiles, to an inner one, and which, because it led the worshippers right in front of the altar and the sanctuary, had been made by far the largest and richest of all the ten that afforded the faithful access to the second or more sacred enclosure. This noble gate is described by Josephus as made of Corinthian brass, very richly overlaid with gold and silver plates, and so massive as to task the strength of twenty men to turn its leaves

upon their hinges. There were several considerations which influenced this helpless man in the selection of this position. For one thing, crowds of people would pass through this gate at least three times every day. Beggars generally select public thoroughfares. Then these crowds would be composed of the best people in Jerusalem. The impious and unsympathetic rabble would not care to resort daily to the temple at the appointed hours of prayer. Besides, men in going to and coming from the place of prayer would be in a better mood for considering the poor and supplying their wants than in the tumultuous whirl of business. The exercises of piety are favorable to the display of benevolence. Men who approach God in true worship are, above all, men disposed to help their suffering fellow-men. Piety is the fountain of philanthropy. Indeed, there is no true love for men that does not spring from love to God. And it is a fact that almost all the alms of the world are administered at the "gate of the temple." Organized systems of charity were unknown to Paganism, and even to the Jews. All the asylums on earth for poverty, decrepitude, and disease are to be traced to the influence of Christianity. Her coming found the world without a single house of mercy. The so-called refinements of Paganism made no provision for the comfort of age or the solace of disease, but left the helpless and the sick to random charity, or to the yet more precarious providence of the gods. Even Judaism knew nothing of an organized and national philanthropy. And as these charitable institutions are the trophies of Christianity, so they are dependent to a very great extent for their moral and pecuniary support on those who go up to the temple at the hour of prayer. Almost all the benevolent movements of society are dependent directly or indirectly on the churches for their success.

II. HIS MIRACULOUS CURE (vs. 1, 3-11). — The apostles did not abruptly sever themselves from the old dispensation. Peter and John had not ceased to be Jews because they believed in Christ; hence they are "going up into the temple at the hour of" evening "prayer." Indeed, the Church of Jerusalem observed the Mosaic ritual up to the destruction of the temple.

I. *The instruments of his cure.* Omnipotence was the efficient agent, but Peter and John were the instrumental authors of his restoration. The association of these two men has now this peculiarity, that it was spontaneous. On other occasions this union was arranged and ordered by the Master; on this it was voluntary. Yet they were, perhaps, the most dissimilar in temperament of all the apostles. One or two features they possessed in common, but in the main they were as unlike each other as two men could be. Their intimacy, under this view, presents a picture of singular suggestiveness. Religion does not plane down the temperaments of men to a standard sameness. Following the analogy of nature, it discountenances monotony. The beauty of the landscape consists not in the multiplication and extension of similar objects, but in the apt collocation of things that are distinct. The combination of

different elements is the secret of the most beautiful phenomena. The sunshine and the storm clasp hands, and span the heavens with a radiant bow. The world's daily chorus is made up of myriads of distinct voices. It is even so in the church. Men as opposite as the poles become one in Christ Jesus. And by this blending of spirits in holy action the truth makes headway. The practical and the pensive, the impulsive and the cautious, the choleric and the gentle, the sanguine and the melancholic, unite in the service of Christ; and in their union, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, is strength as well as success.

2. *The method of his cure* (vs. 4-7). As the apostles were about to pass through the Beautiful gate their attention was called to the impotent man that sat by it begging. He "asked to receive an alms" of them. He had long ago ceased hoping for anything else. However lofty his aspirations might have been in early youth, they were now all dead. He did not now expect to be anything other than a life-long cripple, or anything better than an abject beggar. Forty years of helplessness and beggary will kill hope in the most sanguine heart. The apostles felt within them the stirrings of a Divine power, prompting them to put forth, on his behalf, faith in their glorified Lord.

(a) *The look*. "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us." There is a great deal in a look. The eye, when it is the medium of a great living thought, is a mighty organ. There was power in this look to arrest attention and awaken expectation. The sympathizing eyes of Peter met the wondering eyes of the beggar, and the latter felt a strange sensation, like a stream of electricity, thrilling his entire system. It is a characteristic of true Christianity that it fastens its eyes on the destitute, the diseased, and the decrepit. Science seeks out the secrets of nature; art fastens its eyes on the beautiful, but Christianity seeks out the ills that afflict man, that it may remove them.

(b) *The word*. "But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none," etc. (v. 6). The man sought alms, which the apostles could not give; but they gave him that which was immeasurably better — the ability to earn money, and be evermore independent of alms. Health without money is infinitely better than money without health. In giving the greater blessing they gave the less. The Gospel does not aim directly at improving men's circumstances; it aims at improving *men*, and the improvement in circumstances follows as a matter of course. It is vastly better to *make* men good than to *do* them good. The infant Church had no silver and gold; the two chief apostles going up to the temple had not a penny to bestow in alms. But the Church to-day cannot plead poverty. She needs to be careful lest with the accumulation of material wealth there come upon her moral and spiritual weakness and poverty. It is recorded that Thomas Aquinas, who was highly esteemed by Pope Innocent IV., going one day into the Pope's chamber, where they were counting large sums of money, the Pope said to him, "You see that the Church is no longer in an age in

which she can say, 'Silver and gold have I none!'" "True, holy father," said Aquinas; "neither can she say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'" The Church had gained in wealth since apostolic times, but she had lost in spiritual force; and the loss more than counterbalanced the gain. The miracle was wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. All the apostolic miracles were thus wrought, according to Christ's own command (Mark 16:17, 18). "In the name," that is, by the delegated power, "of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," an allusion to the contempt with which that name was popularly regarded, "walk." The man might have answered, "You mock me; I cannot walk, I have never walked a step." But Peter's word implied that a faith and a volition were required on the part of the cripple, and he met the condition.

(c) The act. "And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up." This was designed to help his faith. Here, as in many of our Lord's miracles, the healing word was attended by an outward touch or movement serving to connect the miraculous effect with the person by whom it was produced. Indeed, it is worthy of notice how entirely, in this first recorded miracle wrought by an apostle, the manner of Christ's own miracle-working is kept up. The miraculous, and much more, the spiritual and ordinary, power of Christianity is always connected with the use of appropriate means.

3. *The reality of his cure* (vs. 8-11). Luke describes his cure with the accuracy of a physician: "And immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength."

(a) The effect upon the man himself (v. 8). Startled, frightened, as men are at strange good fortune, he lifted himself as he felt a current of vital force thrilling and tingling through his palsied limbs. A warm, strong hand, from whose touch a Divine force seemed to emanate, grasped him. For the first time in his life he stood up like a man. The poor ankles bore him. He essays to walk. The first step! Sure and firm still. It is no dream, it is real. And then a wild, exuberant joy possessed him, "and leaping and praising God," he made full proof of his new-found powers. "He held Peter and John." He dreads the loss of this glorious gift. There is something pathetic in the way he clings, like a child, and passes with them into the temple to give the good Lord the praise.

(b) The effect upon the people (vs. 9-11). The miracle was public. The worshippers who crowded the place at that solemn hour were witnesses of the scene. "And all the people saw him walking and praising God." The subject of the miracle was well known (v. 10). Many had seen him lie there by the Beautiful gate year after year, a helpless cripple. There could be no mistake in the matter. The people, therefore, "were filled with wonder and amazement." The healed man was still clinging to his benefactors, when the whole multitude "ran together unto them in the porch called Solomon's, greatly wondering." How the apostles used this opportunity will appear in our next lesson.

FEB. 4, 1883.]

LESSON V.

[ACTS 3:12-21.

THE PRINCE OF LIFE.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"In him was life; and the life was the light of men."—John 1:4.

TIME.—A.D. 30. **PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(12) And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ¹man? or why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to

walk? (13) The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his ²Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate when he had determined

¹Or, *thing*.

²Or, *Child*; and so in v. 26; 4:27, 30. See Matt. 12:18; Isa. 42:1; 52:13; 53:11.

12. **When Peter saw it.**—Saw the people assembling in such multitudes and wondering at the miracle (v. 11).—*Barnes*. **Answered unto the people.**—To their looks of inquiry and amazement. The word *answered* does not imply any previous questioning; it is commonly used in the New Testament in describing the commencement of an address (Matt. 11:25; 22:1; Luke 7:22).—*Abbott*. **Why marvel ye at this man?**—Or, *at this thing* (margin) which has happened to him, either of which constructions is admissible.—*Alexander*. **As though by our own power or godliness, etc.**—Peter does not reprove the people simply for expressing great astonishment, but for assuming that the healing of the man had been an independent act of the apostles, performed solely by them. For the wondering and steady gaze of the people seemed to say, "What vast power resides in these men!" Or, "What holy men these must be, since God rewards them with such miraculous gifts!" Peter, therefore, denies that he and John possessed either such a physical power as the people imagined, or such a meritorious ability of the soul.—*Lange*.

13. **The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.**—The miracle which so amazed them was not wrought by magic, or by any unknown power, but by that of Jehovah, their own God, and the God of their fathers. To express the idea more emphatically, he employs the customary formula, in which the three first patriarchs are separately named (see Exod. 3:6, 15, Matt. 22:32). **Hath glorified**, by this extraordinary miracle, performed in Christ's name, and by his authority.—*Alexander*. **His Servant Jesus.**—The Messiah is constantly designated by this title, "Servant of the Lord," in the second part of Isaiah (chaps. 40-66), as the one who carries out the deliberate plan of God in the redemption of the world. The title is directly applied to Christ (Matt. 12:18) in a quotation from Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my Servant, whom I have

to release him. (14) But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, (15) and killed the ³Prince of life; whom God raised from

the dead; ⁴whereof we are witnesses. (16) And ⁵by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is through him

³Or, Author,

⁴Or, of whom.

⁵Or, on the ground of.

chosen," and occurs in the Acts four times with the same signification (vs. 26; 4: 27, 30). It is never conferred upon the Apostles, and although they are called "servants of God" in our version (James 1: 1) the Greek term is a different one. — *Schaff*. **Whom ye delivered up.** — As a nation, through their constituted rulers, the Jewish people delivered Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor, to be sentenced. **And denied before the face of Pilate.** — *Denied* is here, not merely, denied that he was their Messiah and their King, though this is true (John 19: 15), and is included in the statement, but rejected him wholly, his claim, his authority, his salvation, his lordship, invoking his blood on their own heads (Matt. 27: 25). — *Abbott*. **When he had determined to release him.** — Better, *when he had decided*; the word implying, not a purpose only, but a formal act, as in Luke 23: 16. — *Ellicott*.

14. Holy and righteous. — Are epithets expressive not only of his innocence before the law (Matt. 27: 19, 24), but in a higher sense of his peculiar character and mission as the Holy One of God (Mark 1: 24; Luke 1: 35), whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world (John 10: 36). *The Just* or (*Righteous*). *One* is a common description of our Lord in the New Testament. — *Alexander*. **Asked for a murderer to be granted unto you.** — The fact that Barabbas was a murderer as well as a robber is stated by St. Mark (15: 7) and St. Luke (23: 12) only. — *Ellicott*.

15. And killed the Prince of life. — The word *prince* is literally *leader*, then the *progenitor* of a race, then the *originator*, the one from whom anything, whether good or bad, proceeds. — *Abbott*. The same word is translated "*author* of our salvation" (Heb. 2: 10) and "*author* of our faith" (Heb. 12: 2), and designates the person from whom salvation and life flow. — *Schaff*. Christ is the *author* of life, as he is also the *leader* into life eternal, being the first-fruits of them that rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15: 23). — *Abbott*. **Whereof we are witnesses.** — St. Peter falls back, as in chap. 2: 24, 32, on this attestation to the one central fact. — *Ellicott*.

16. By faith in his name hath his name made this man strong. — We have, in technical language, the efficient cause distinguished from the indispensable condition of its action. The name did not work as a formula of incantation; it required, on the part both of the worker and the receiver, faith in that which the name represented, the manifestation of the Father through the Son. — *Ellicott*. **Whom ye behold and know.** — There could, therefore, be no mistake. He was well known to them. There was no doubt about the truth of the miracle (chap. 4: 16), and the only inquiry was in what way it had been done. — *Barnes*. **The faith which is through him.** — The causation of the miracle is carried

hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. (17) And now, brethren, I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. (18) But the things which God foreshowed by the

mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. (19) Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the pres-

yet another step backward. The faith which was alike in the healer and the man healed was itself wrought in each by the power of Christ. — *Ellicott*.

17. **And now, brethren.** — The appellation *brethren* softens the address, and reminds the hearers that in nationality and religious faith he is one with them. — *Abbott*. **I wot.** — This antiquated word is the present tense of the verb *to wit* (A. S. *witan*) = to know, and its past tense is *wist*. — *Cam. Bib.* **That through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.** — (See Luke 23: 34; John 16: 3; Ch. 13: 27; 1 Cor. 2: 8; 1 Tim. 1: 13). — *J. F. & B.* The language of Peter concedes to them such a palliation of the deed as consisted, at the time of their committing it, in the absence of a distinct conviction that he whom they crucified was the Lord of Life and Glory (Luke 23: 34; 1 Cor. 2: 8); but it does not exonerate them from the guilt of having resisted the evidence that this was his character which had been furnished by his miracles, life, doctrine, resurrection. — *Hackett*.

18. **By the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ should suffer.** — The purpose of the whole of the Scripture is to set forth the redemption of man through the suffering of Christ. So that from the first mention of the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3: 15), there had been a constant chain of testimony that the Christ should suffer. — *Cam. Bib.* **He thus fulfilled.** — Not by directly obliging the deed; not by decreeing it; but by admitting others' foreseen wicked deeds into accomplishing his great and wonderful purpose. — *Whedon*.

19. **Repent ye therefore.** — Seeing that your guilt, great though it be, does not shut you out from pardon and reconciliation in the blood of the Messiah, whom you crucified. **And turn again.** — That is, turn from your present way of life unto the Lord (Acts 9: 35) or unto God (Acts 14: 15). **That your sins may be blotted out,** obliterated, as it were, from the book of record where they were written. The same idea is expressed in Ps. 51: 9; Col. 2: 14. — *Schaff*. This figurative expression was much more forcible with the ancient mode of obliteration. The ancients wrote on tablets with wax, and when they wished to blot out what they had written, they used the flat end of the iron pen, and thus obliterated every trace of it. So the repenting sinner who turns to this risen Saviour has the promise of an utter expunging of his sins — rubbing out every trace of them — from God's book of account. — *Jacobus*. **That so there may come seasons of refreshing, etc.** — The meaning of the promise I take to be, primarily, seasons to the individual of spiritual revival, i.e., the bestowal of new life, of which God is the author, and which are always accompanied by a peculiar consciousness of his presence; and secondarily, similar seasons of reviving to the church or the commu-

ence of the Lord; (20) and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus: (21) whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

nity, but always on the same conditions, viz., repentance and a change of life, and always preceded by a free forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Thus the exhortation of this verse is exactly parallel to ch. 2: 38. I understand this verse then to be a promise of free forgiveness and a new spiritual life, i.e., pardon and regeneration, upon the simple condition of a change in the purpose and direction of the sinner. — *Abbott*.

20. **And that he may send.** — This sending is, by the construction of the Greek, dependent on their repentance, as is the *times of refreshing*. **Who hath been appointed, etc.** — This refers to the appointment of God from before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1: 20; Rev. 13: 8). I therefore understand Peter here to refer to that spiritual sending of the Son by the Father to the individual soul, on condition of its repentance and conversion, without which Christ is never truly brought home to the soul, nor the soul led to accept him as its Saviour. See John 6: 37, 39, 44. — *Abbott*.

21. **Whom the heaven must receive.** — The difficulty which the Jews had in receiving Christ as the Messiah arose out of the belief that he would set up an earthly kingdom, and abide on the earth as a temporal sovereign. This opinion the apostle corrects by saying that it was necessary that *the heavens* should receive their Lord even *until the times* — not the seasons, but *the times* when the reign of Christ should be permanent in the hearts and over the wills of men, according to the prediction and declaration of the prophets. — *Denton*. **The restoration of all things.** — This far-reaching expression is probably meant to comprehend the rectification of all the disorders of the fall, and the interval "until" that consummation embraces (as *Bengel* remarks) the whole period between the Ascension of Christ and His Second Coming in glory. — *J. F. & B.* **Whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets.** — Such a period of holiness and happiness is the theme of all prophecy in every age in the Old Testament. But the Jews read their sacred books in a false light, and passed over the plain intimations of some of their noblest prophecies, that the glory they longed after and the triumph of the Messiah could be reached only through his suffering and death. — *Schaff*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — The miracles of Christianity are not merely or mainly simple expressions of benevolence. Primarily they are attestations of the Divine commission of the miracle-worker, as an inspired teacher of truths from God. Miracles should always be considered in connection with this design, which is, indeed, a part of their nature. They should not be separated from the message which they were intended to authenticate. They are calls to attention, commanding men to

hear what the Lord says through those whom he has chosen and endowed to speak and write in his name. Hence Peter follows the miracle at the Beautiful gate with the proclamation of that Divine message for which it was designed to prepare the way, and of the truth of which it was to be the Divine attestation.

Lesson Topics. — I. Christ Proclaimed. II. Repentance Urged.

I. CHRIST PROCLAIMED (vs. 12-18). — Recall the scene at the close our last lesson. The healed man still clinging to the two apostles in the first transport of grateful attachment, and the whole multitude gathered around them, in that part of the sacred precincts which was called "the porch" or colonnade of Solomon. It was there that Jesus himself had stood and taught less than six months before, in the winter season, at the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-39). There too, it would seem, the company of the believers were accustomed to congregate, while a solemn awe rested upon the hearts of others, forbidding them to pretend or to intrude (Acts 5:12-16). The moment was favorable for the proclamation of the Gospel, and Peter embraced the opportunity.

1. *He points to Jesus as the author of the healing.* The people evidently believed that the apostles had wrought the miracle by their "own power or godliness," and they looked with mingled amazement and awe at them, and every heart trembled with a strange reverence in their presence. Peter begins by disclaiming for himself and his colleague the authorship of the miracle. His tone is that of one who can see nothing surprising in a Divine Person proving himself true and proving himself powerful. "Why marvel ye at this man? or why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk?" The people were marvelling, not merely at the fact that the man was healed, but at the means by which they thought it had been accomplished. Peter seeks to correct their false impressions, and assumes that, when the real authorship is seen, there is no occasion for marvelling. There is One above, exalted after humiliation, glorified after suffering, alive after being dead, whose hand is here working. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers" not a god, a deity believed in by some other nations, nor an unknown God, but the God *they* believed in, *their* God, One whom for generations they as a people had owned and worshipped — "hath glorified his servant Jesus;" hath raised him from the dead and given him glory "whereof we are witnesses." Then the apostle makes his explanation of the miracle perfectly clear, by connecting it with the name of the risen and glorified Jesus. "And by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong," etc. (v. 16). Here is the solution of the mystery. The "name" of Christ is Christ himself. He himself, as crucified, and risen, and glorified, gives this miraculous soundness of which they all were witnesses. And as his "name," which is he himself, was the Author, so faith in his

name, that is, faith in himself, was the true and only instrument of the miracle. These apostles had unbounded faith in their risen Lord; they believed in his power and in his activity in his Church. By this faith they were invested with the ability so to preach and work as to demonstrate to the world the Divinity of him in whose service they were engaged. It is a great thing to feel it to be natural that a living Saviour should also work. We have so long ceased to expect grand and striking results from the Gospel that it is a long step forward, when we see the reasonableness of expecting Jesus Christ to fulfil his own word.

2. *He reminds them of their treatment of this Saviour.* Peter incidentally but boldly and accurately outlines their conduct toward Jesus when he was on the earth. They had "delivered him up." "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." They rejected him; abandoned him to his enemies; gave him into Gentile hands, praying that he might be put to death. "And denied him in the presence of Pilate;" denied his Messiahship. They indignantly refused to recognize him as their King, and overbore by their violence the repeated confession of the heathen magistrate that he "found no fault in him," and his repeated desire "to release him." Thus "they denied the Holy and Righteous One" — a character this which the consciences of Judas who betrayed him, and Pilate who condemned him, compelled them to acknowledge as belonging to him. His life was without a stain. Standing in their crowded temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, six months before his death, he had challenged them all: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" Yet they denied him, "and" — O blind perversity! — "asked for a murderer to be granted unto" them. "Not this man," they had cried, "but Barabbas," and "Barabbas was a robber," and not a robber only, but a murderer. He "in the insurrection had committed murder." "And killed the Prince (Author) of life." Here is another terrible antithesis. They preferred the destroyer of life, the murderer Barabbas, to the Author of life — the Divine spring of the natural life which all possess, the spiritual life which all may possess, and the glorified life of heaven. They "killed" him. This is the climax of their folly and wickedness. It is true they did not with their own hands take that sacred blood; but God sees through all these sophistries, and counts as done by men that which they get done. Him "God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." He was alive, this Jesus whom they had thus treated. His divinity and the legitimacy of his claims were established. They were in the presence of a demonstration of his power. No wonder if they are alarmed and convicted, and ready, like those at Pentecost, to cry out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" The direction of Peter's sermon from this point indicates that this was their condition of mind.

II. REPENTANCE URGED (v. 19-21). — Convicted of the awful charge which Peter had just made, and left there, the people must have utterly despaired. But he does not leave

them there. Having brought his hearers to feel the need, he now proceeds to excite the hope of pardon, and to declare the conditions upon which it may be had. "And now, brethren, I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." It may not have been true of all, but it certainly was true of the vast mass of the people, who wheeled so readily from applauding Jesus to execrating him, that neither when they did the one nor the other had they any real knowledge on solid grounds who he was. While such ignorance was vastly more culpable in its spiritual guides than in the mob, yet it seems to have been true of many even of them that they had no conception of what they were doing when they put Jesus to death. Paul says that, "had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." So Christ himself prayed on the cross for his murderers, and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They ought to have known, but they did not. And through that guilty yet ignorant act of man there was wrought out a mysterious but most real purpose of Divine love. "The things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled." He brought unto good that which they meant only for evil; through their murder of his beloved Son was accomplished the redemption of the world.

1. *The Apostle's Exhortation.* Their ignorance was only the reason why they might hope for pardon; not the reason why they needed no forgiveness. Hence Peter exhorts them earnestly, "Repent ye therefore, and turn again." What does he mean?

(a) "Repent ye." Repentance in the New Testament means a change of mind, such a change as produces reformation. It implies conviction of sin; that is, a sense of guilt before God. Few men would refuse in a vague and general way to acknowledge that they are sinners. Such a confession does not shock even the most fastidious taste. This does not prevent them from going on carelessly in the path of sin. This is not the conviction implied in repentance. Once have this wrought in the heart, once by such a process get a true estimate of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and it will be impossible to rest in it. This conviction is wrought in the soul by the truth and Spirit of God. Repentance also involves sorrow for sin. It is not every kind of sorrow for sin, however, that goes to make up genuine repentance. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret; but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). "Godly sorrow" is of grace, and humbles us under a sense of our sinfulness before the Lord; "but the sorrow of the world" is selfish, causing us to feel afflicted, not because we have offended our heavenly Father, but because we have injured and exposed ourselves. The next thing implied in repentance is confession of sin. This must sometimes be made to both God and man. When our sin has been of such a nature as not only to violate God's law, but to wrong and wound our fellow-man, then confession must be made to the latter as well as to God. If the

offence be against God only, then to him only is it to be confessed; but if it be against a brother-man — if his rights have been invaded, his property appropriated, his reputation stabbed — then there is no genuine repentance which does not involve confession to him. This confession must sometimes be accompanied by restitution. If property or money has been wrongfully obtained, it must be given back to the rightful owner; if the true penitent has robbed any one of his reputation by the tongue of slander, he will as far as possible undo the mischief he has done. Repentance is no trifle. It is very far from being a mere sentiment. It is far removed from all shams and all guilty compromises.

(b) "And turn again." Repentance, if it be genuine, always culminates in reformation from sin. The change of mind is followed by a change of life. This is just what is implied in the word here used by the apostle. The sinner has found out that he has been wandering "in a land that was not good, and in a way that was not pleasant." And now his conviction takes practical shape and purpose: "I will arise and go to my Father." He has been going away from God, he must "turn" and come back to him. The word translated "turn again," when used in the New Testament in a religious sense, appears generally, if not always, to denote the change which takes place in a man's apprehensions, feelings, and course of action *preparatory* to his entrance upon the privileges and duties of the Christian life. That is certainly its meaning here. It comprehends an abandonment of the love and practice of sin, and a believing application to God through Christ for pardon and all the blessings of the Divine favor and indwelling. These are the conditions of salvation by Christ; repentance and conversion; change of mind, and change of life; a review of the past with true contrition, and a turning to God with full purpose of amendment, and earnest prayer for forgiveness.

2. *The motives by which he enforces it.* He puts the blessed results of such a course plainly before them, both as they may be realized at once, and as they shall enrich the future.

(a) "That your sins may be blotted out." This is the immediate result, forgiveness. This expression contains a figure borrowed from the business of commerce. The allusion is to the act of a creditor cancelling from his books the charges against his debtor when a proper adjustment is made. With one dash of his pen the whole is stricken out, and the man stands acquitted of all. The sinner is like the man who owes ten thousand talents, and has nothing to pay; but he has only to repent and turn to God, to have the guilty record obliterated, and to be freely justified from all things.

(b) "That so there may come seasons of refreshing." Spiritual enjoyment and strengthening. The word rendered "refreshing" literally means "breathed upon." The idea is that of a revival by fresh air; the result of letting in a breeze of cool and invigorating air upon one who has been long fainting under a sultry and oppressive atmosphere. The promise held

out is that "from the presence of the Lord" there shall come seasons of rest, and renewals of strength, security, and comfort, after the heat and burden of the day, the struggle with temptation, persecution, and affliction. Times of refreshing! We need such times. This promise belongs to the life that now is, but will find its grandest fulfilment in heaven.

(c) "And that he may send the Christ." He had gone away from them to heaven. This was one of the greatest difficulties with which these Jews had to contend. They were full of the idea that the Messiah would set up an earthly kingdom, and abide among them as a temporal sovereign. The apostle corrects this erroneous notion by explaining that "the heavens must receive" him "until the times of restoration of all things whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Psa. 110; Isa. 42:1-4; 55:10-13; 60:1-22). His throne is in heaven, not on earth, and there it will remain until these prophecies are fulfilled, and he comes to judge the world and wind up the affairs of his mediatorial kingdom. The arrival of the times thus indicated is made to depend upon the repentance and conversion of men. Repent and turn in order that the restoration of all things may be hastened, and Christ appear.

FEB. 11, 1883.]

LESSON VI.

[ACTS 4:1-14.]

NONE OTHER NAME.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."—Verse 12.

TIME.—A.D. 30. **PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) And as they spake unto the captain of the temple and the people, ¹the priests and Sadducees came upon them:

¹ Some ancient authorities read *the chief priests*.

1. **As they spake unto the people.**—The ever-increasing crowd (see v. 4) seems to have called the attention of the temple authorities to the miracle and the subsequent teaching of Peter and John.—*Schaff*. **The priests.**—Those whose duty it was at the time to take charge of the Temple services, and who probably had taken offence at the multitudes assembled in the Temple court.—*Cam. Bib.* **The captain of the temple,** was the head of the band of Levite sentinels whose function it was to keep guard over the sacred precincts. His presence implied that the quiet order of the Temple was supposed to be endangered.—*Ellicott*. **Sadducees.**—A name of doubtful origin, but commonly traced, either to the name of a founder (Zadok), or to a Hebrew word

(2) being sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (3) And they laid hands on them, and put them in ward unto the morrow: for it was now eventide. (4) But many of

them that heard the word believed: and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

(5) And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together, in Jerusa-

denoting *righteous*.—*Alexander*. This sect rejected all that mass of oral tradition which entered so largely into the teaching of the Pharisees, but accepted the written word (not merely the books of Moses) as the rule of faith. They denied a future life and the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23: 8). Their power at this time was out of proportion to their real numbers, but they included in their ranks many of the most influential of the nation. The high priest's family appears to have consisted mainly of Sadducees (Acts 5: 17).—*Schaff*. Came upon them.—This expression implies that they came in a *sudden* and *violent* manner. See Luke 20: 1.—*Barnes*.

2. **Being sore troubled.**—This word has the same sense here as in the classics, namely, *hard-worked*, exhausted by labor, and then, by a natural transition, wearied, out of patience, from the long continuance or frequent repetition of the cause, whatever it might be. In this case they were tired of hearing the apostles, and resolved that they should teach no longer.—*Alexander*. And proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.—That is, in this as the crucial instance in which the resurrection of the dead had been made manifest.—*Ellicott*. Here we have the real ground of the hostility of the Sadducees, who well knew that if this single instance of one being raised from the dead were substantiated, their creed would be at once discredited.—*Schaff*.

3. **Put them in ward.**—That is, they took them into *custody*, or into safe-keeping.—*Barnes*. For it was now eventide.—The narrative started, it will be remembered, from 3 P.M. (chap. 3: 1). The "eventide" began at 6 P. M.—*Ellicott*. This last clause may imply that it was either unlawful or unusual, or more probably than either, inconvenient to assemble the Sanhedrin at night, or on so short a notice.—*Alexander*.

4. **Many of them that heard the word believed.**—In sharp contrast to the arrest and persecution of the two leaders and the hostility of the rulers.—*Schaff*. And the number of the men.—The original implies *male converts*, though this is questioned by some scholars. But the language does not justify the deduction that as yet only men attached themselves to the Church (*Olshausen*); rather as in Matt. 14: 21, it indicates the number of males besides women and children, *i. e.*, the number presumptively, of heads of households. In Jewish estimates the number of women converted would be less significant.—*Abbott*. Came to be about five thousand.—It seems probable, though not certain, that St. Luke meant this as a statement of the aggregate number of disciples, not of those who were converted on that day.—*Ellicott*.

5. **Their rulers.**—The rulers of the Jews.—*Barnes*. *Rulers* is best explained as a generic term, including the two classes mentioned, *elders*

lem: (6) and Annas the high priest *was there*, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. (7) And when they had set them in the midst, they in-

quired, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this? (8) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders, (9) if we this day are examined con-

and scribes. These are two of the orders represented in the national council, which is said to have been composed of seventy-one persons, in imitation, if not in actual continuation, of the seventy elders who assisted Moses (Num. 11: 16). — *Alexander.* A meeting of the Sanhedrin is described. — *Abbott.* This consisted of three orders: — *Elders*, heads of families who had a seat in the great council; *Scribes*, the recognized teachers and interpreters of the divine law; and the *High Priest*. In other passages this third order is termed "the chief priests." These chief priests included the reigning high priest, with others of his house who had borne the title, and possibly also the heads of the twenty-four courses of priests. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court in the Jewish nation. It tried accused persons, and its decisions admitted of no appeal. — *Schaff.* In Jerusalem. — It may have been that some of the authorities were not residents in Jerusalem, but had to be summoned. — *Cam. Bib.*

6. *Annas the high priest.* — The actual high priest was Caiaphas (John 11: 49): but Annas, his father-in-law, had once held this dignity (7-15 A.D.) and still kept the title. The high priest under Jewish law held his office for life, but the Herods and the Roman governors frequently deposed the high priests to serve political purposes. *Caiaphas.* — He married the daughter of Annas, was nominally high priest from 24 A.D. to 36 A.D., and was deposed at the beginning of the reign of Caligula by Vitellius, then governor of Syria. *John and Alexander.* — Nothing positively certain is known of these two. — *Schaff.*

7. *In the midst.* — In the presence of the great council. — *Barnes.* By what power, or in what name, have ye done this? — Thus admitting the reality of the miracle, which, indeed, afterwards they confess themselves unable to deny (v. 16). — *J. F. & B.* The question was not asked for information; for the apostles had already publicly declared that it was done by the power and the name of Jesus of Nazareth (ch. 3: 6, 16); and it was this, their declaration, not the healing, which led to their arrest (v. 2). But a distinct statute provided (Deut. 13: 1-5) that every prophet who should attempt to turn away the allegiance of the people from Jehovah should be put to death, and the question was asked here, either to lay a foundation for a charge of blasphemy against the apostles in attempting to win the allegiance of the people to Jesus, or to frighten the apostles into a retraction or modification of their assertion. — *Abbott.*

8. *Peter filled with the Holy Ghost.* — The tense implies an immediate, sudden inspiration, giving the wisdom and courage, and words which were needed at the time. The promises of Matt. 10: 19, 20; Luke 21: 14, 15, were abundantly fulfilled. — *Ellicott.*

9. *If we this day are examined.* — The word is employed in its

cerning a good deed done to an impotent man, ²by what means this man is ³made whole; (10) be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* in ⁴him doth this man stand

here before you whole. (11) He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. (12) And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.

² Or, in whom.

³ Or, saved.

⁴ Or, this name.

technical sense of a judicial interrogation, as in Luke 23: 14. **Concerning a good deed.** — Strictly, *an act of beneficence.* — *Ellicott.* Ironical surprise runs through Peter's reply, that they should be tried for doing a good deed. There is an emphasis on these words in contrast to the *this* of v. 7. — *Schaff.*

10. **Be it known . . . to all the people of Israel.** — As if emitting a formal judicial testimony to the entire nation through its rulers, now solemnly convened. — *J. F. & B.* **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified.** — The boldness of the declaration was startling. He does not shrink now from confessing the Nazarene as the Messiah. He presses home the fact that, though Pilate had given the formal sentence, it was they who had crucified their King. He proclaims that He has been raised from the dead, and is still as a power working to heal as when on earth. — *Ellicott.*

11. **He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders.** — The reference is to Ps. 118: 22. Christ applies the same prophecy to himself in Matt. 21: 42. — *Abbott.* The council are fitly called the builders, for on them depended the whole religious and civil government of the people. — *Cam. Bib.* They had rejected him; but God, by raising him from the dead, had shown that he was the corner-stone on which the spiritual temple on earth must rest. — *Schaff.*

12. **And in none other is there salvation.** — The apostle has ceased altogether referring to the lame man, and has passed over to the thought that the salvation of the soul is dependent upon Christ. Not only diseases of the body might be healed in his name, but on it men might rest when they thought of eternity. — *Schaff.* **Any other name.** — *Name* is here used in allusion to its frequent repetition in the foregoing context, and of course with the same latitude of meaning. No other person, no other authority, no other invocation, etc., may be all included. **Under heaven, i.e.,** in the world, or on the earth. **Given, i.e.,** by authority, bestowed by God, from whom all saving methods must of course proceed. **Among men,** is not simply *to men*, as the objects of the favor, but among them, with a reference to its diffusion. No other method of salvation has been made known and diffused by God's authority. **Wherein, in which,** not only by it as the means, but in the possession, use, and application of it. **Must be saved,** not only may, as a matter of option or of right, but must, as a matter of necessity, if saved at all. — *Alexander.*

(13) Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled: and they took knowledge of

them, that they had been with Jesus. (14) And seeing the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

13. The boldness.—The word implies freedom and readiness of speech such as would not be expected from the unlearned. — *Cam. Bib.* **Unlearned and ignorant men.**—*Unlearned* is *unversed in literature*, here, untaught in the Jewish schools, the Rabbinical being the only literature which the Pharisaic teachers recognized as legitimate subjects of study; *ignorant* is more probably *common* people, in contrast with public and recognized teachers. — *Abbott.* **They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.**—Or identified them as persons whom they had seen before in company with Jesus; their wonder sharpening their recollection. So *Meyer*, *Alford*, *Baumgarten*, *Hackett*, *Lechler*, etc., understand this remarkable statement; and perhaps they are right. But the historian's remark may mean rather that in the whole demeanor of these men the Council observed what irresistibly brought Jesus himself before their view, as he had stood before them but a few weeks before, and convinced them that their intercourse with him was what had stamped upon them this calm, lofty heroism:—"We thought we had got rid of him; but lo! he reappears in these men, and all that troubled us in the Nazarene himself has yet to be put down in these his disciples." — *J. F. & B.*

14. The man ... standing with them.—Either arrested with the apostles the night before, as being in part the means of provoking disturbance, or summoned as a witness, or coming voluntarily before the court to testify for the apostles, or possibly as a mere spectator. All these conjectures have been suggested. — *Abbott.*

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction.—The miracle at the Beautiful gate, as we have seen, wrought a marvellous change in the lame man, and produced a powerful impression on all the people. The discourse which Peter founded upon it produced results vastly more important and far-reaching. It led to the first assault upon the infant Church. It brought the new faith into violent conflict with the national authorities. The peaceful prosperity of the primitive Church here met with its first interruption. The apostles now enter upon the fiery trial of persecution. That day began the long and glorious history of Christian confessorship and martyrdom.

Lesson Topics.—I. Enmity against Christianity Aroused. II. The Power of Christianity Illustrated.

I. ENMITY AGAINST CHRISTIANITY AROUSED (vs. 1-3, 5-7).—While the apostles were still speaking to the people in Solomon's porch they were violently interrupted and arrested.

1. *The representatives of this enmity* (1, 2). "The priests, and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees." It is a Jewish persecution. Even "the captain of the temple" was a Jewish, not a Roman officer. So it was in the case of the Master. "A servant is not greater than his Lord." They who had despised and rejected the Lord; they who, by the help of Gentile hands, had wrought his death, will also hate and persecute the servant. So he had foretold (John 15:20), and now we find it true. The Gospel of reconciliation could not be introduced into the world without conflict. It is a striking fact that the first shock of that conflict had to be sustained, not in the sphere of Paganism, but in that of a system of which Christianity was the antetype, and by means of which the preparation for its coming light and glory had been in course for hundreds of years. The first wounds of the Church were received in the house of its friends. No hostility developed so rapidly, so fiercely, and for so long a period, as that of the Jews. For centuries after the apostolic era a large department of the literature of Christianity was devoted to the refutation of Jewish slanders; and this bears testimony to their unrelenting hatred to the Gospel and its heralds. The expression of this hatred was not confined to the province of literature, but assumed a yet more formidable aspect, — often breaking out into lawless violence, and hurrying on to fatal results. The very system in which the *idea* of the Gospel had been developing for two thousand years was the most vigorous and deadly opponent of that idea when realized in the simple and beautiful Faith of the Redeemer.

In the case before us, however, the enmity against Christianity was represented especially by the Sadducees. For some time after the ascension the Church of Christ came not into collision with Judaism in the main. Its earlier conflicts were rather with the philosophy of the Sadducees, the prime tenet of whose faith was that the soul had no separate existence after death, and, therefore, could not reanimate the flesh in order to be judged or dealt with in another world; for the first preaching of the apostles was founded on the resurrection of the crucified Nazarene. The announcement of the resurrection, even as a theory, was offensive; but when it was preached as a fact, which had already received its accomplishment, we can still less wonder at their rage and violence. The Pharisees, who constituted by far the larger division of the Jewish sects, were secretly pleased at the check thus given to the theory of their rivals. Hence they took no steps against the new Galilean heresy. In fact, about this time, their great and learned leader, Gamaliel, openly hinted that the new Faith might possibly be of God. But though the Sadducean sect was small, it was wealthy and powerful. It held the chief offices of state, and controlled the priesthood. At this time it was dominant. It is the presence of the Sadducees in this arrest of the apostles that gives significance to the event. "The captain of the temple," as the officer charged with keeping order within the sacred precincts, had an obvious

excuse for interference; the excited crowd gathered around an unauthorized teacher might fairly enough be described as a disorderly proceeding. "The priests," who had just been officiating at the evening services, would naturally enough join the temple police in the interests of order. So far the action of the authorities might not have meant much. But this was not all. The temple officials were set on by the Sadducees. They were "sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The arrest was not made because of the disturbance in the temple, but because of the nature of the apostles' teaching.

2. *The expression of this enmity* (vs. 3, 5-7). The apostles were cast into prison (v. 3). The miracle at the gate of the temple was performed at the hour of evening prayer—three o'clock in the afternoon. The interruption of the apostles' teaching and their arrest could not well have taken place before the approach of sunset. It was too late to hold a session of the court that day. The night must intervene before their trial, and the prisoners were, therefore, put in safe-keeping until the morning. Then they were arraigned before the Sanhedrin (vs. 5-7). The historian implies that special pains were taken to have a full gathering of the body. All who were of the high-priestly race were summoned, and attended. They were Sadducees. The form in which the Sanhedrin sat was that of a semi-circle; the high priest, as president, in the centre, at the head of the room. The apostles were "set in the midst" of them, that is, the area surrounded by the seats of the members, and facing the high priest. Then "they inquired, by what power, or in what name, have ye done this?" Their question assumed their belief that the lame man had really been healed. That fact was beyond all dispute. The only question was, by what power, or in what name, it had been accomplished. To understand this question, it must be remembered that there existed at that time, as for long before, a numerous class among both Jews and Gentiles who pretended, by magical forms and the invocation of names, to work wonders. Such practices had been forbidden by the Mosaic law on pain of death (Exod. 22:18; Lev. 19:31; 20:27; Deut. 18:9-14), but they were never extirpated from among the Jews. We find allusion to them at intervals all through their history (1 Sam. 28; 2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chron. 33:6; Isa. 2:6; 57:3; Micah 5:12; Mal. 3:5). In our Lord's ministry they were quoted to him as rivals (Matt. 12:22-30), later they encountered Peter in Samaria (Acts 8:9-19), and Paul in Cyprus (Acts 13:6-12) and at Ephesus (Acts 19:11-20). It is in this light we must read the question of the Sanhedrin. A wonder is confessed; the doers of it are assumed to have done it in some supernatural "power," or by the charm of some compelling "name;" and they are asked to say in what sort of "name" or "power," divine or magical, good or evil.

II. THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY ILLUSTRATED (vs. 4, 8-14). — Here, as in all its history since, the opposition of its enemies, instead of enfeebling the energy and retarding the prog-

ness of Christianity, evolves its victorious powers and renders its advance more certain and rapid. This is here illustrated —

1. *By the number of its converts* (v. 4). There was a large ingathering of souls. The enemies of the truth were aroused, and its preachers were cast into prison; "but," notwithstanding all this, in spite of it all, "many of them that heard the word believed." Not only despite the persecution, but, perhaps, *because* of it, were many attracted. Persecution gives an impulse to the cause of truth in two ways: It presents on the one side such a hideous manifestation of evil as produces a social recoil; and on the other such an exhibition of Christian patience and fortitude in the spirit and conduct of the sufferers as awakens sympathy and admiration, and gives to the religion of the martyr a strong power of attraction. In this way the blood of the martyr has often become the seed of the Church. In this case so many believed that the number of Christ's followers was brought up to full five thousand men, besides the women and children.

2. *By the conduct of its advocates* (vs. 8-12). "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost," not in his habitual indwelling only, but by a special communication for the emergency now arisen, according to the promise of his Master, "For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say," — Peter, thus filled with the Holy Ghost, made their defence; brief, bold, and earnest. When their Master stood before that same Sanhedrin a few months before both these men had forsaken him, and one of them had expressly and repeatedly denied him. Their conduct now is in strong contrast with their course at that time. The resurrection of their Lord, and the special advent of a divine influence at Pentecost account for this change. Mark —

(a) The boldness and wisdom of their answer. Peter unequivocally ascribed the power that had healed the lame man to "Jesus Christ of Nazareth," whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. "What, then," the whisper would run round, "he confesses it was not in the name of Jehovah!" Nay, but the apostle had not ended. Out of their own Scriptures Peter proved to them that their rejection of Jesus was the seal and sign that he was that Messiah to whom Jehovah had promised to give his own incommunicable name. "He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner." That stone of which the Psalmist wrote as taken up and thrown aside by the builders as unworthy of being used at all in their work, but afterwards exalted into the foremost and most signal position of the whole building, that stone is Christ. He it is who came to his own, to be by them despised and rejected, but whom God has exalted as the head over all things to the Church, yea, as the possessor of all power in heaven and in earth, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Thus Peter paved the way for a strong, unflinching assertion

that only through Jesus could salvation come from God to any soul of man. In this he goes far beyond the case, which was the immediate matter of inquiry; but not without reason. To him, as to his Master, each minor salvation from any ill of body, or earthly suffering, was but a visible promise of the one universal salvation from both moral and physical evil of every sort, which Jesus came to work. The cure of this lame man, about which inquiry was being made, is a picture of higher and larger things. The healing of maimed and crippled bodies is an image in clay, as it were, of the higher healing, the healing of maimed and crippled souls. "Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee," said the Saviour to a man whom he had healed and restored. Out of sin springs all the weakness, all the sickness, all the misery of the world. And the healing force that is in the name of Jesus finds its full sphere of blessing only in delivering men from sin. "And in none other is there salvation." Man is by nature morally crippled and helpless; a beggar, a bond-man, carried about at another's will. What a cripple is among men, a sinner is before the angels and pure spirits on high. All sin works by privation. It shuts up senses and organs which God meant to be inlets of joy and channels of life. There is but one name—but there is one—by which man can be made whole, sound, strong, glad, and free. Believe on the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified and risen, and make the liberty and the joy all your own.

(b) The effect of their answer (vs. 13, 14). The Sanhedrists were astonished that common men, who had never been educated in the law, could stand in such a presence with so much boldness, and speak with so much wisdom. "And they took knowledge of them, that that they had been with Jesus." The boldness of these men, unlearned as they were, in their testimony for the truth, made them marvel; and the strangeness of the combination seems to have reminded them of him whom these men owned as Master; they recognized them by this sign as having been with Jesus. We may all be witnesses for Christ in the same manner. By being brave and consistent in our confession of Christ; by never being ashamed of him; by claiming and finding the Master's promise, that in every season of difficulty the Holy Spirit shall open our lips in courage and in wisdom; we may show that we have been with Jesus. Men shall take knowledge of us alike by our meekness and our boldness, where we have been, and in whose presence. The members of the Sanhedrin were silenced. "And, seeing the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." Facts are stubborn things. There was the man who had been "lame from his mother's womb," standing with the apostles, completely cured. What could they say? There was no use in denying it. The best way to silence the enemies of Christianity is not by engaging in vain wrangling with them, nor by declaiming, with pious horror, against their positions, but by presenting to them the triumphs which Christianity has achieved. Show them the facts. Point them to the morally

blind who have been made to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the moral cripples who have been restored by the power of Jesus' name. Thus they can be silenced. The revolutions wrought in the lives of those who accept it in loyalty and love is the grandest proof of the divinity of the Gospel to which we can appeal, when dealing with its enemies.

FEB. 18, 1883.]

LESSON VII.

[ACTS 4:18-31.]

CHRISTIAN COURAGE.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "If God is for us, who is against us." — Rom. 8:31.

TIME. — A.D. 30. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(18) And they called them, name of Jesus. (19) But and charged them not to Peter and John answered and speak at all nor teach in the said unto them, Whether it be

18. **And they called them, i. e.,** Peter and John back again into the council chamber. — *Cam. Bib.* **Not to speak at all.** — The Greek is even more forcible: *absolutely not to utter. . .* The very name of Jesus was not to pass their lips. — *Ellicott.*

19. **Peter and John answered.** — Not necessarily both of them; one may have acted as spokesman for the other. But the utterance represented the spirit and purpose of both. — *Abbott.* **In the sight of God.** — An appeal to God as the Judge, — as sitting invisible in that council before which they were then pleading. — *Schaff.* **To hearken unto you.** — *Hear* or *hearken* never of itself means to *obey*, but that idea is often necessarily implied, as in chap. 3: 22, 23; Luke 10: 16; 16: 31; John 5: 24; 8: 47; and in the dialect of common life, where men are said to hear or not to hear advice or instruction, by a natural figure, without any reference to Hebrew usage. The word itself suggests more than obedience, namely, attention and intelligence, as necessary antecedents. — *Alexander.* **Rather than unto God.** — The meaning is not as in the A. V., that they should hearken unto God more than they hearken unto man; but in this matter they should hearken unto God, and not to man at all. — *Alford.* **Judge ye.** — The concluding words, *Judge ye*, admit of two interpretations somewhat different in emphasis and force, if not in their essential import. One meaning, and perhaps the one most commonly attached to them, is, "you may judge for us; we are willing, in a case so clear to abide by your decision." The other, and to my mind the most striking and impressive, is, "you may judge for yourselves, and take the consequences of your own decision; but as for us, we cannot but speak," etc. — *Alexander.*

right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: (20) for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard. (21) And they, when they had further threatened them, let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done. (22) For the man was more than

forty years old on whom this ¹miracle of healing was wrought.

(23) And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. (24) And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O ²Lord, ³thou that didst make the heaven and the earth, and the sea,

¹ Gr. *sign*.

² Or, *Master*.

³ Or, *thou art he that did make*.

20. **We cannot but speak, etc.** — The pronoun is emphatic: "we, for our part." . . . The question at issue was one of bearing witness, and that witness they had received a special command to bear (chap. 1: 8). — *Ellicott*. The point of the apostles' reply was, that they were not teaching the people as self-appointed rabbis, but were only acting as witnesses of Jesus and in obedience to God. — *Schaff*.

21. **Finding nothing how they might punish them.** — The idea is not that they were able to invent no charge against the apostles, but none which they felt it safe to adopt. — *Hackett*. **Because of the people.** — Who would be rendered indignant by punishment inflicted for so good and so merciful a cure. Comp. ch. 2: 47. — *Abbott*.

22. **Forty years old.** — The evangelist here follows the track of popular thought. The miracle was genuine, for both the notoriety and the age of the man so demonstrated it. — *Whedon*.

23. **Came to their own company.** — Literally, *their own people*. The statement implies a recognized place of meeting, where the members of the new society met at fixed times. — *Ellicott*. These no doubt had come together on the threatening aspect of the affairs of the little community, as the arrest of the two leaders by the orders of the Sanhedrin was of course known throughout Jerusalem. **Reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them.** — Nor did their story on the whole give fair promise for the future. Dark and stormy days evidently lay before the little community. The highest authority in the nation had condemned them; and though the Sanhedrin had been for the moment restrained from severe measures, it was clear that when the temporary pressure of public opinion was removed the majority of the council would proceed to harsher measures. So they now prayed very earnestly for help and succor. — *Schaff*.

24. **Lifted up their voice to God.** — To lift up the voice to God means simply they *prayed* to him. **With one accord.** — Unitedly. Properly, with one *mind* or purpose. — *Barnes*. A concert of hearts, not of voices, is implied. One may have uttered a prayer for all, and one in which all spirits united, or, as suggested by Baumgarten, all may have said or sung the second Psalm, and then one of the company may have applied it to their condition. The report is probably not *verbatim*. — *Abbott*. **Lord.** —

and all that in them is: (25)
 4who by the Holy Ghost, by
 the mouth of our father David
 thy servant didst say,
 Why did the Gentiles rage,
 And the peoples 6imagine vain
 things?
 (26) The kings of the earth
 set themselves in array,

And the rulers were gathered
 together,
 Against the Lord, and against
 his 6Anointed:
 (27) for of a truth in this city
 against thy holy Servant
 Jesus, whom thou didst
 anoint, both Herod and Pon-
 tius Pilate, with the Gentiles

4The Greek text in this clause is somewhat uncertain.

5Or, *meditate*.

6Gr. *Christ*.

The Greek word is not the common one for Lord (*Kyrios*), but *Despotes*, the absolute Master of the Universe. — *Ellicott*. In the case before us, it has reference to God's creative power, and his sovereign authority over his creatures thence arising, as appears from the remainder of the verse. — *Alexander*. **The heaven and the earth, and the sea.** — Each region of creation being contemplated in its distinctness. — *Ellicott*. The apostles strengthen their faith by recalling the all-mighty power of their Divine Master — *Abbott*.

25. Who by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of our father David. — The quotation is from the second Psalm (vs. 1, 2), which is explicitly declared to be the inspired work of David and a prophecy of Christ. — *Alexander*. **Why did the Gentiles rage?** — The Greek word translated *rage*, is originally descriptive of the wild snorting of spirited or intractable horses. — *Lange*. **Imagine vain things.** — *To imagine a vain thing*, is to purpose vain things; here, to lay plans which were both innately empty and worthless, and also in vain, as all plans in opposition to God must ever be. — *Abbott*.

26. The kings of the earth . . . and the rulers, etc. — There is an exact correspondence between the leading enemies mentioned in the Psalm and those who were present at the condemnation and death of Jesus. The Gentiles were represented by the Roman soldiery and officials; the kings of the earth, by King Herod: the rulers, by Pontius Pilate the governor. The Lord in the Psalm corresponds to the maker of heaven and earth, and the Lord's Anointed, to "Thy holy child Jesus." — *Schaff*.

27. This verse justifies the application of the prophecy to Jesus, by showing the agreement of the circumstances. For is therefore to be taken in its strict sense as a logical connective. "This is really a prophecy of him, for," etc. **Of a truth**, not merely *doubtless*, but *in fact*, literally, really, as opposed to a mere verbal correspondence or a fanciful accommodation. — *Alexander*. **In this city.** — These words answer to the statement of *Psa. 2: 6*: "Upon my holy hill of Zion." **Whom thou didst anoint.** — Anointing is the form of consecration to a sacred office. Oil denotes the spirit of grace, and anointing signifies the sanctifying and qualifying of the person by the Holy Spirit for the discharge of any duty. Hence Christ is called the Anointed, as set apart to be the King and Priest. — *Murphy*. **Herod.** — This Herod was Antipas, the son of Herod the Great by his Samaritan wife Malthace. He

and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, (28) to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. (29) And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants to speak thy

word with all boldness, (30) while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of thy holy Servant Jesus. (31) And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein

¹Gr. *bond-servants*.

was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 3: 19), and because our Lord belonged to Galilee, Pilate took occasion to send Jesus to be examined by him, as Herod was in Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Passover. **Pontius Pilate.** — The sixth Roman Procurator of Judæa. — *Cam. Bib.* Their union against Christ is narrated by Luke 23:12. — *Abbott.* Were gathered together. — Unity without truth is conspiracy. The wicked unite, not through love, but through their common hatred to him they ought to love. — *Augustine.*

29. To do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. — The *hand* of God is his power, the *counsel* of God is his wisdom; the declaration, as in chap. 2: 23, is that the arrest, condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, though wrought by the rage and vain counsel of wicked men, fulfilled the divine purpose, and was carried out under, and subject to, the divine control. It belongs to the theologian, not to the commentator, to consider the relation of this truth, the absolute sovereign control of God over all his life, to the freedom and responsibility of the individual; in my judgment, both truths are taught by life and by Scripture, but their reconciliation transcends the limit of human thought. It ought, perhaps, to be observed that the declaration is not made here that God determined *who* should execute his purpose, but only that the deeds done were what he had determined should be done. — *Abbott.*

29. Look upon their threatenings. — "Keep thine eye upon their threatenings," that they may not be accomplished. **Grant unto thy servants.** — Literally, *slaves*, the Greek word being the correlative of *Lord* or *master*, in v. 24. The two together are descriptive of absolute authority on one hand and of absolute subjection on the other. — *Alexander.* **To speak thy word with all boldness.** — It is worthy of notice how the spirit of the Master had sunk into the disciples' hearts. No fire from heaven is called down on the heads of the enemies of Christ and the Church; only for themselves they pray for bravery and constancy in view of the hostile and threatening attitude of the rulers. — *Schaff.*

30. While thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal. — This verse defines the way in which they desire their petition to be granted. The boldness of the servants was to be secured by displaying the power of their Master. — *Alexander.* Thus the mighty works were to be a sign and testimony to the words which the apostles spake. — *Cam. Bib.* **Through the name of thy holy Servant Jesus.** — To his glory, not to their own. — *Abbott.*

31. The place was shaken. — That they might feel at once that the

they were gathered together: spake the word of God with
and they were all filled with boldness.
the Holy Ghost, and they

God of all nature, to whom they had appealed (v. 24), was among them. In their immediate need an immediate answer is vouchsafed, and a token with it that their prayer was heard. — *Cam. Bib.* This is not to be conceived of as an accidental earthquake, but as an extraordinary shaking of the place directly affected by God, analogous to what happened at Pentecost. — *Meyer.* These events were the Amen of their petition. — *Lange.* They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. — The physical sign was only an accompaniment of the spiritual blessing. — *Abbott.* Spake the word of God with boldness. — That is, wherever they found occasion and opportunity, neglecting the threats of the council, and endowed with the boldness for which they had prayed. — *Cam. Bib.*

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction.—The members of the Sanhedrin were not only astonished and silenced in the presence of the miracle wrought by the apostles, and the doctrine which they founded upon it, they were also sorely perplexed. They found it necessary to command Peter and John to withdraw that they might confer together (v. 15). In their secret meeting they acknowledged that a notable miracle had been wrought (v. 16), and determined upon a course which would, as they hoped, arrest its influence upon the people. What this course was comes out in our lesson.

Lesson Topics.—I. The Command of the Rulers. II. The Answer of the Apostles. III. The Prayer of the Church.

I. THE COMMAND OF THE RULERS (v. 18).—Mark the conduct of the Jewish rulers as it is set before us in this narrative. They had, a few months before, compassed the death of Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Messiah predicted in their own Scriptures. Two Galileans, who had been followers of the Crucified One, are found in the temple teaching the multitude that this Jesus is alive again, and that through his name and living power a lame man has been instantly and completely cured. They are arrested, and in the presence of the Sanhedrin they repeat their declaration, and the healed man, who is well known, is present to demonstrate the reality of his cure. Here are two facts alleged: Jesus is risen from the dead; a miracle has been wrought by his power. What did the council do in the presence of these allegations? Honest men, under official responsibility to find religious truth for their countrymen, would have fastened on two such alleged facts as, if true, of primary importance, and would have investigated their credibility to the bottom. But these men were not honest. They passed by the first of these particulars, and the chief of them—the resurrection of Jesus—in absolute silence. The second—the healing of the lame man—which because of its notoriety

they could not entirely ignore, they noticed, not to inquire what religious meaning such a fact might have, or what bearing on the Messiahship of Jesus; but only this: How can the affair be best hushed up? They did not pretend to inquire whether by any possibility the apostles might be in the right; they did not attempt to dispute the fact of the recent miracle, nor to explain that fact on any hypothesis of their own; they only knew that their own authority depended upon upholding an existing system, which must go down if the Gospel were generally admitted to be true; and they therefore determined not to admit the Gospel to be true. At all costs they would prop up the present system. Official bigotry is always afraid of new facts. It knows of nothing better to do with fresh light than to keep it from spreading. These Jewish rulers, having called the apostles once more into their presence, "charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." This was as far as they dared to go. The people — the plain common men, who, when he was upon earth, heard Jesus gladly — were all glorifying God for the miracle of healing which they had witnessed. Any attempt to inflict punishment on the apostles would be unwelcome and unpopular. Thus the course of these rulers was by no means a plain one. No wonder they were perplexed. It is far more perplexing and troublesome, if we knew all, to pursue a wrong course than a right one. If it is sometimes difficult and sometimes dangerous to serve God, yet on the whole it is a saving of trouble and perplexity to have a single aim in life, and that aim the right one. The man who is fixed in absolute loyalty to the true and the right avoids a thousand intricacies and a thousand embarrassments to which the worldly-minded and the double-minded are perpetually liable.

II. THE ANSWER OF THE APOSTLES (vs. 19, 20). — Though the command not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus was uttered by the spiritual rulers of their people Peter and John refused to obey. Their disobedience was justifiable because it involved a higher obedience. They had received from their Lord a clear and unmistakable command to teach all nations, and to be witnesses for him in Jerusalem, and Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Matt. 10:35; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8). It would not be "right in the sight of God to hearken unto" these rulers and obey their command, and they would not do it. The will of God laid on the consciences of these men an absolute moral necessity, a compelling duty to speak. "But Peter and John answered, and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye" — we leave you to judge; "for we cannot but speak" — we, for our part, cannot refrain from speaking — "the things which we saw and heard." Those things of which our own eyes and ears were witnesses, we could not, even if we would, conceal. The noble courage and fidelity of this answer is apparent. Its spirit is altogether admirable. There is on the part of these apostles no unruly complaining or scolding, no pompous assumption of

superior holiness, no concealment or dissembling, but only plain frankness and a quiet determination to be true to God, and abide by the result.

Their example is worthy of all acceptation and the imitation of all. The will of God is the imperial rule of life for every man. This must be obeyed rather than the commands of man, in any capacity, or under any circumstances — man, either as parent, prince, or priest; and it must be obeyed regardless of consequences. There is no probability that we shall ever be called to stand as these apostles stood, before an earthly tribunal, and be forbidden to speak at all in the name of Jesus. But our fidelity will be tested in other ways not less decisive. In a thousand ways the demands of the world and the voice of public opinion is contrary to the will of God. In society, in business, at home, many a one in many ways is called to face a prohibition like that laid upon Peter and John. We learn from the example before us what we ought to be able to answer in such cases; what we ought to be able to act upon in the face of such prohibition. There is a tribunal below; and there is another tribunal above. These are contrary, the one to the other, so that he who would obey both cannot. The one is human and temporal; the other is Divine and eternal. Who can for one moment doubt which of the two we ought to live for?

"We cannot but speak!" This means surely that their hearts were full of these things, and they would utter them. If they would suppress, if they would be silent, they could not. To have been eye and ear witnesses of the facts in which was wrapt up God's salvation for the world bound them to speak. To have been silent would have been disobedience to the supreme voice of God, and treason against the spiritual hopes of mankind. On every one there lies a measure of responsibility, small it may be, but his own, to quench or conceal no light which God has kindled in him. And it is his fidelity to duty, not the magnitude of his service, which approves the servant.

The brave answer of the apostles, leaving the rulers to judge whether it could be right in God's sight to hearken to them more than to God, produced no impression; they only, "when they had further threatened them, let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them because of the people." The decision of the Sanhedrin was weak, and their subsequent course was far weaker. Their hollow authority came into collision with the might of conscience enlightened by the truth — there can be no doubt in such a contest. The power of the miracle and of the truth which followed it brought the people to recognize the hand of God, and rendered these Jewish rulers powerless for the time being.

III. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH (vs. 23-31). — Peter and John were at last released. "And being let go, they came to their own company." This was perfectly natural. They were impelled to this course, for they had news to tell, and they knew that their brethren would prove interested and sympathizing listeners; they were drawn to this course, for they had a great

work to prosecute, and they knew that their brethren would prove willing and earnest co-laborers. It is the same still. Like draws to like. "Birds of a feather flock together." There are restraints; every man suffers a kind of imprisonment by his circumstances. The restriction comes to many largely from the necessity of toiling for daily bread. Life is for labor; but there is a time of rest, when the restraints of toil are removed. What then? Two men work together side by side in the same factory, but, "being let go," they separate at once. Now they are free to do as they please; they show the bent of their minds; they reveal themselves as they are. The spirit of one is different from that of the other. They choose different scenes and companions. Each goes to his "own company." Freedom is thus a test of character. Where, with whom, how do you spend your leisure hours? There is no more important question than that for us to face. In this life we are never perfectly free. Labor, law, custom, public opinion, hinder us from acting out ourselves fully, and doing just what we desire. But there is a time coming when this state of things will be ended. Death is, in the deepest sense, a letting go, and then each one goes to his "own company." There is a terrible significance in the word concerning Judas, "that he might go to his own place." In eternity every spirit finds the place and company for which it is prepared.

The apostles "reported" to the Church "all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them." The questions asked, the charges laid upon them, the threatenings added in case of disobedience, were all rehearsed in this friendly audience. The moment was felt to be critical for the infant Church. It is true that the Sanhedrin had found itself powerless to enforce its decision for the present. Still, it had decided; and its verdict was against the new faith. This was a heavy blow. It meant that there was no prospect of a national recognition of Jesus as the Messiah by a reversal of the national judgment which condemned him; for the supreme national authority had just rejected the risen Redeemer. Henceforth their work would be much more difficult; for every word spoken for Christ must be spoken at the risk of persecution, and every man who joined the new faith must brave the Sanhedrin. What was the effect of all this? Was anything said of forsaking Christ and fleeing, as they had done when he was himself led to his trial? Was it proposed to enter into any compromise, such as that of leaving the city, and carrying their new doctrine among the Gentiles? None of these things. Listen —

"And they, when they heard it," heard that danger was before them, heard that preaching was forbidden, heard that punishment would follow upon persistence, "lifted up their voice to God with one accord." They made their appeal to God in their peril, called to him in their difficulty, confided to him their anxieties and distresses. In this prayer there is a recognition of the Divine authority and creatorship: "O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that

in them is." The word here translated "Lord" is that from which our English word "despot" is derived, and it stands for authority that is absolute; it is the word by which a slave addresses his master, and the subject his sovereign. The disciples use this word as though to remind themselves of that entire right and dominion over them which is the surest pledge of concern and guardianship. There is here also a recognition of God as the Author of an ancient prophecy, which portrayed the furious and vain hostility of the world to Christ, and which was fulfilled in his treatment by "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel," but only so far as to execute his Divine purpose. The petition of their prayer was, that God would give a spirit of courage "to speak the word with all boldness," and glorify their Master by continued tokens of his favor and presence. They pray for the miracle-working power. To fortify their hearts, and carry forward the new kingdom, they pray "that signs and wonders may be done through the name of thy holy servant Jesus." At no later period would the Church have laid such exclusive stress on this external aid of miracle. Long since has she outgrown it altogether, and learned to lean on the native, self-commending virtue of the Gospel message, enforced to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their prayer was answered, both by sensible signs and spiritual influences, and the result was seen in their further ministry. Witnesses for Christ do their work and win their victories in the face of day; but their strength must be got where Jesus got his, in secret.

FEB. 25, 1883.]

LESSON VIII.

[ACTS 5:1-11.]

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." — Prov. 12:22.

TIME. — A.D. 30. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his

1. **But a certain man.** — In striking contrast to the entire self-abnegation of Barnabas (ch. 4: 37), appears the conduct of another of the converts, Ananias. — *Schaff*. The whole history must be read in connection with the act of Barnabas. He, it seemed, had gained praise and power by his self-sacrifice. Ananias thought that he could get at the same result more cheaply. — *Ellicott*. **Ananias, with Sapphira his wife.** — With her concurrence or consent. — *Barnes*. *Ananias* means Jehovah is gracious; *Sapphira* either sapphire or beautiful. — *Abbott*. Their names were favorable and beautiful; their principles bad. — *Bengel*. **Sold a possession.** — Namely, a piece of land, v. 3. — *Whedon*.

wife, sold a possession, (2) and kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (3) But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to ¹lie to the Holy

Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? (4) Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power? How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart? thou hast not lied

¹Or, *deceive*.

2. And kept back part.—This is a strong word and contains the idea of dishonesty and robbery. It is translated *purtaining* in Tit. 2: 10, and is the word for Achan's sin in the Greek translation of Josh. 7: 1. The sin of Ananias did not consist in his retaining a portion of his goods, as is plainly indicated in v. 4, but in desiring to give the false impression that he had given up all. He was guilty of perjury, though he perhaps had uttered no words.—*Schaff*. His wife also being privy to it.—This is mentioned to show that the offence was an aggravated one, and had not been committed without deliberation and set purpose. She was a willing accomplice in the intended fraud.—*Cam. Bib.* And laid it at the apostles' feet.—This was evidently an act *professedly* of devoting all to God. Comp. chap. 4: 37; also vs. 8, 9. That this was his *profession*, or *pretence*, is further implied in the fact that Peter charges him with having *lied* unto God, vs. 3, 4.—*Barnes*.

3. Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart?—It was in the assembly of believers that Ananias presented his offering. We are not told how Peter obtained his information respecting the fraud; still, we can have no doubt that it was no earthly presence which guided and executed the judgment of that court. In Peter's question, two points stand out prominently: (1) There is a distinct acknowledgment of the personality and agency of the spirit of evil, Satan; (2) and Peter evidently recognizes man's free will, his power to resist, if he choose, the promptings of the evil one (James 4: 7).—*Schaff*. **To lie to the Holy Ghost.**—There is no intimation that Ananias had directly uttered a falsehood, as did his wife (v. 8); a lie in action may be as criminal as a spoken lie. They lied to the Holy Ghost, not merely because they lied to the Church, which was the body of Christ, the temple of God, and filled with the Holy Ghost, or to the apostles, who were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and whose divine power of insight they ignored, but because the offering was made, not to the apostles, nor to the church, but to God, and the act was thus a direct falsehood addressed to Him.—*Abbott*.

4. Whiles it remained.—As long as it remained unsold. And after it was sold, etc.—Even after the property was sold, and Ananias had the money, still there was no obligation on him to devote it in this way. He had the disposal of it still.—*Barnes*. This shows conclusively that no compulsory abandonment of property, or absolute community of goods, existed in the primitive Church. Power, not physical but moral authority, discretion. The sin of Ananias was therefore perfectly spontaneous and gratuitous, without coercion or constraint *ab extra*. He was

unto men, but unto God? (5) And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all that heard it. (6) And the ² young men arose

and wrapped him round, and they carried him out and buried him.

(7) And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing

² Gr. *younger*.

not required to sell his land, or, having sold it, to devote the proceeds to a public use. His freedom from all antecedent obligation so to do is the very soul of this expostulation, robbed of which it becomes utterly unmeaning.—*Alexander*. **Conceived . . . in thine heart.**—Notice that although Satan had suggested it, and filled his heart, yet Ananias is regarded as wholly responsible for it, and as the author of the crime.—*Cook*. **Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.**—The expression is not to be weakened, as if it meant only that Ananias lied not so much unto men as unto God; but that his sin against men was nothing in comparison with his sin against God.—*Gloag*. Not only is the *personality* of the spirit assumed in v. 3, but here he is spoken of as God, for the reference is manifestly to the Spirit. To lie to the Holy Ghost is to lie unto God, because the Holy Ghost is God.—*Schaff*.

5. **Ananias . . . gave up the ghost.**—Those who criticise the severity of the punishment find fault with God. It appears unduly severe only if our consciences fail to judge aright the heinousness of the sin. Observe, (1) That no sentence is pronounced by Peter. There is nothing even to indicate that he anticipated the death of Ananias. The death of Sapphira he foretold (v. 9), but he did not inflict it. There is, therefore nothing in the account to justify the Church in inflicting temporal punishments. (2) The death of Ananias, if it stood alone, might, perhaps be attributed to the natural effect of shame and remorse at the public exposure of the hypocrisy. Coupled with the immediately succeeding death of his wife, it is impossible for an unprejudiced reader to doubt that it was the special and direct infliction of God.—*Abbott*. **Great fear came upon all that heard it.**—Fear of God, an intelligent fear of his searching vision and unerring sure judgment, and a dread conviction of the deadliness of sin.—*Butler*.

6. **The young men.**—Literally *the younger men*. Not a class of officers, for there is no evidence of any such class in the primitive Church, but simply the younger men in the assembly. The religious service, whatever it was, continued; a few of the younger men carried out and buried the corpse.—*Abbott*. **Wrapped him round.**—Wrapped him in his own clothes, or shrouded him in grave-clothes. The last was not so probable, considering the haste with which the burial was performed.—*Alexander*. **Carried him out**—i. e., out of the city (compare Luke 7: 12).—*J. F. & B.* **And buried him.**—In the East an interval of only a few hours is left between death and burial. In Jerusalem to-day the rule is not to defer burial more than three or four hours after decease.—*Schaff*.

7. **Not knowing what was done, or rather, what had happened, i. e., to her husband.** How she had remained so long in ignorance of what

what was done, came in. (8) And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much. And she said, Yea, for so much. (9) But Peter *said* unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and

they shall carry thee out. (10) And she fell down immediately at his feet, and gave up the ghost: and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her by her husband. (11) And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things.

must have been so generally known is not revealed, and it is idle to conjecture. Such exceptions are not only possible, but familiar matters of experience. — *Alexander*.

8. **Peter answered unto her.** — Her entrance into the assembly, where one sad thought was present in each one's heart, was, as Bengel happily says, equivalent to her speaking. So Peter looking at her, answers her mute look of inquiry with the words, **Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?** — Pointing at the same time to the money Ananias had laid at his feet three hours before. Had she at this moment possessed the courage to confess the truth, she had been saved; but she had practised the same miserable deceit as her husband and repeated the lie: "Yea, for so much." — *Schaff*. A wilful falsehood is a cripple and cannot stand alone. It is easy to tell one lie, hard to tell but one lie. — *Fuller*.

9. **That ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.** — That is, to make trial; to prove whether there is a divine Spirit, and what is his knowledge. Comp. Judges 6: 39; Luke 11: 16; 20: 23. Their action involved a practical if not a theoretical disbelief in the presence and omniscience of the Spirit of God, to whom they had offered a part, seeking credit for the whole. **The feet of them . . . are at the door.** — Not that Peter heard the tread of the young men returning; not even, necessarily, that they had just then returned; they may have been standing without some time. The *feet* is a common expression for the person of a messenger or carrier (Isaiah 52: 7; Nah. 1: 15; Rom. 10: 15). **Shall carry thee out.** — This is not a sentence of death. Peter speaks as a prophet, not as a judge; he does not give sentence, he foretells. — *Abbott*.

10. **Found her dead.** — The death was instantaneous. She lay dead in the midst of the assembly, and the young men laid her in the grave at the side of her husband. — *Schaff*.

11. **Great fear came upon the whole Church.** — Fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1: 7). — *Abbott*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — The infant Church emerged from her first trial triumphant. Her numbers had been greatly enlarged. Filled anew with holy courage, the apostles set at naught the

prohibition of the rulers, and obeyed God rather than men. In this they were supported by the whole body of believers. To take up such a position of open defiance to the lawful heads of the nation was a serious step, and one likely to entail the most painful consequences. Social ostracism, scourging, and imprisonment of the leaders, scattering of the followers—all these things were coming, and any man might foresee that they were sure to come. Nevertheless, the disciples showed themselves prepared to face all these by the cordiality with which they clung together. The storm drove them closer; it could not scatter them. They were all of one heart and one mind; and, in the generous impulse of their intensified love, they had all things in common; those who had property selling it, and laying the price at the apostles' feet, as a contribution to the common stock. This general description the historian exemplifies by allusion to a particular case, which illustrates the reality and power of the ruling principle (4: 32-37). In such a spirit was the Church preparing for her conflict with the world. But, just as Israel, when entering upon her struggle with the Canaanites, was arrested by the sin of Achan, so was the Church now imperilled by a kindred crime.

Lesson Topics.—I. The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira.
II. Their Punishment.

I. THE SIN OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (vs. 1-4).—These two, members of the Christian community, and, doubtless, partakers of a measure of gracious influence, yet yielding to a selfish ambition to win the name of being generous and zealous without the requisite personal sacrifice, "sold a possession and kept back part of the price," while they laid the rest at the apostles' feet, as if it were the whole. Their crime consisted not only in sacrilegious retention of money which they had vowed to God, but also in the deliberate endeavor to gain credit for having given up the whole price of their land, and in their tempting the omniscience of God. The essence of their sin was **HYPOCRISY**. It was their own deliberate and voluntary act. They were under no legal obligation to give their property in this way—even the portion they did offer. Peter expressly told them, that after having sold their land, with the ostensible purpose of giving the money to the common stock, it was still their own. The whole guilty proceeding was their own. This is implied in the question, "How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart."

True, they were tempted by the devil to the deed. We must not leave out of account that wily and powerful tempter to whom Peter points us in his question to Ananias: "Why hath Satan filled thy heart?" But the fact that they were thus tempted did not affect their personal responsibility. They might have resisted his suggested evil, and they ought to have done so. It was their own fault that, by entertaining his suggestion, they suffered him to fill their hearts. The tempter is still abroad among men. His presence is not to be forgotten; nor is

his influence ever to be detested more surely than in a lie, above all, such a lie as sin tells when it would pass for virtue. There are many in our day who claim to have exploded the idea of a personal devil, and to have resolved him into a mythological representation of the principle of evil. But it is obvious that all we know, or can know, on this subject is contained in the Bible; if it is there declared that there is such a personality in the universe, no man lives, or has ever lived, who is competent to deny it. And it is equally obvious that the Bible, simply and naturally interpreted, does teach us that there is a malignant, wily, powerful, and industrious being, whom Peter here calls Satan, who is the enemy of mankind, and who tempts and seeks the destruction of all men. Yet, notwithstanding this teaching, there seems to be in the minds of many a great repugnance to the idea of Satan's personality, and men have been at great pains to get it out of the way. But there is nothing to be gained by getting rid of the existence and personality of the devil, when there is so much that is devil-ish left to account for. If all we see in human history of outbreathing wickedness, hatred of goodness and of God, relentless cruelty, and diabolical malignancy, has its spring alone in the heart of humanity, then we must conclude that the race is more deeply and thoroughly depraved than we ever have dreamed of, and certainly more than those who are so anxious to exorcise theology would be willing to admit. The human heart is capable of much that is bad; but we are glad to think it is not equal to the production of all we find in history, or even in ourselves. There is comfort and hope for struggling souls in the Scripture; for, as we look on the field where the poisonous tares have so nearly destroyed the wheat, and which it presents to us as a picture of this world, it does not leave us to conclude that all the mischief has been done by man, but declares "an enemy hath done this." A clear view of the Bible teaching concerning the *Evil One* will help to account for the *evil ones* whose existence we cannot doubt. This is not an unimportant doctrine. If there be a powerful, wily, and malignant adversary of our souls, who, in the strong language of inspiration, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," it must be essential to our safety that we clearly recognize the fact, and carefully guard against his assaults. It will not weaken us in the conflict, nor hinder our ultimate triumph, to recognize the existence and the strength of our adversary.

We have said that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was hypocrisy. Analyzing this hypocrisy we find three base elements of which it was composed:—

1. *Vanity*. They unduly loved applause. The disciples had adopted the principle of having all things in common. There was nothing compulsory in the arrangement, but the love that burned in their hearts made the practice general. Ananias and Sapphira, without any heart-sympathy with this system, professed to adopt it, because it was popular. They hoped to purchase to themselves the good opinion of the Church. Their

motive did not rise above this. And we also are daily tempted to live for the honor which comes to us from one another, and not for that honor which is of God only. Let us learn to care more for the approval of Christ than for the applause of our fellow-men. Let us cease asking what the world will say, and inquire only after what is right. Let us look up to God for direction, and take Christ for our example.

2. *Covetousness.* They unduly loved their money. Had they been vain only, they would have kept back no part of the price; had they been covetous only they would have given none of it. It was the union of their vanity and covetousness that produced their crime. In either case the motive would have been a bad one, but in neither alone would the offence have grown to such enormity. What an illustration have we here of the saying of the apostle, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." "Take heed and beware of covetousness." The covetous man is one whose thoughts and conduct are controlled by his passion for gain. Money has a real value, which a wise man cannot despise. As society is constituted, money opens the way to almost all its advantages and enjoyments. In the hands of a good man it may become a means of blessing to the world, and so minister to the highest well-being of its possessor. To desire it is as innocent as to breathe. But the path from lawful desire to inordinate attachment is short and slippery. We begin by loving it for the advantages it procures; and, if we are not exceedingly watchful, we end by loving it for its own sake, and seeking it as the chief concern of life. This inordinate love of money assumes a variety of forms among men, without any difference before that God who searches the heart. One loves money that he may hoard it; another, that he may spend it; and a third simply for the pleasure of acquiring it. Covetousness belongs to all conditions. It is the vice of the rich and the poor alike. The rich man, whose happiness depends upon his fortune, and who seeks continually to increase it, is the lover of money. But the poor man is not less so if he be discontented with the allotments of Providence, and if his heart run after money as its chief good. The principle is the same in both; and if one should succeed to the position of the other he would adopt his opinions.

3. *Falsehood.* Out of the conflict of vanity with covetousness came forth a lie. For a falsehood may be acted. We do not read here that Ananias expressly said that the sum he brought was the whole price of his land. The question was distinctly put to his wife, and she answered it by an express falsehood. But Ananias would seem to have brought a certain amount, and laid it at the apostles' feet, letting it be understood that he was giving the whole price received for his land. Witnessing the honest self-devotion of others in giving all they possessed, he determines to win for himself the same character. He too will seem to be parting with all out of zeal for the Gos-

pel. The sale is in private; but soon he appears in the congregation with the money, which he takes care should be understood to be all he received. Every one gives him credit, and he intends that they should do so, for a devotion which thinks only of things above, and a self-forgetfulness which cannot enjoy so long as others suffer. No word, it may be, is spoken; but the act itself says all this, and the doer intends that all this should be understood. It is thus, in the midst of this acted lie, that the light of God's countenance is fully let in upon the secret misdeed. And terrible indeed to the hypocrite must have been that searching, that unanswerable question, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." It was in a full Church meeting that Ananias came to offer his gift to the Lord; and since the Spirit of God, whose personality and divinity are here unmistakably assumed, was the informing breath of the new Church, the guardian of its purity, and the inspirer of its worship, the man's lie passed beyond his human brethren to the Divine Spirit who inhabited them.

II. THEIR PUNISHMENT (vs. 5-11). — Ananias and Sapphira committed this great sin that they might cheaply purchase a high repute for piety. And they would have succeeded in this endeavor but for one consideration which they left out of sight. They would have succeeded in winning the esteem of men, and yet have kept the money they loved, if they could only have kept God silent. But God thought it necessary to show that young Church that he was in them and among them of a truth. This was the first instance of hypocrisy; and it required to be solemnly dealt with, not only in relation to the delinquents, but in order to excite a reverential fear in the Church, and to prevent the further intrusion of false brethren. The mission of the lightning is not to scathe and strip the solitary tree only, but to purify the whole atmosphere. God saw fit to impress upon all who were connected with the Church, by a terrible proof, the fact that he has not deserted the earth, however much the earth may set aside or forget him. And the fearful fate of these two persons made, as it well might make, a strong and salutary impression upon the hearts of all. The judgment was awfully severe; it was meant to be awful in its severity. To mark the sanctity of the Church, on this earliest appearance of open sin within its fold, follows the earliest infliction of Church discipline. Because it is the earliest it is taken out of the hands of servants, to be administered with appalling severity by the hand of the Master. For it ought to be well observed that it was not Peter who slew Ananias and Sapphira. Not even as the executioner of a Divine sentence can he be said to have slain them. In both cases the stroke was struck by an unseen hand.

There never has been a time from that day to this in which the Church has not needed the lesson. We need it to-day. Men still render to God a divided worship; desire to seem bet-

ter than they are; cultivate a cheap repute for piety; give, that they may have honor of men, while they grudge what they give, and dearly love what they keep; live so that much of their conduct is indeed no better than an acted lie; do much to throw dust into the eyes of others as to their real motive, as to their real self. It is still possible to lie to the Holy Ghost. Because judgment against their evil work and evil worship is not executed so speedily as on this occasion their hearts are set in them to do evil. Upon this guilty man and his guilty wife the judgment was executed instantly; but over how many Ananias and Sapphiras hangs the unexecuted sentence. Every form of hypocrisy must one day be unmasked and punished. "The hidden things of darkness will assuredly be brought to light." Though retribution delay, it is certain. God grant us repentance unto life.

MARCH 4, 1883.]

LESSON IX.

[ACTS 5:17-32.]

PERSECUTION RENEWED.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "We ought to obey God rather than men." — Verse 29.

TIME. — A.D. 31-37. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(17) But the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy, (18) and laid hands on the apostles, and

17 But the high priest rose up. — While the multitudes thronged to be healed (vs. 12-16), the effect on the authorities was to provoke them to opposition. — *Cam. Bib.* Rose up. — That is, proceeded to employ active measures: Annas is no doubt the individual meant, according to ch. 4: 6, although his son-in-law, Caiaphas, was, at that time (John 11: 49; 18: 13), actually the high priest. — *Lange.* And all they that were with him. — That is, who agreed with him in feeling and doctrine, as explained by the next clause. — *Abbott.* Which is the sect of the Sadducees, etc. — The preaching of the resurrection excited the anger of the Sadducees, and the increase in the number of those who believed it aroused their jealousy. Many of the most influential of the nation belonged to this sect. — *Schaff.* That these were Sadducees is stated in explanation of their special heat against the apostles, the central truth of whose preaching was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. — *Abbott.*

18. Laid hands on the apostles. — The first step of the movement is the same as in the former case, to wit, arrest and imprisonment, not as a punishment, but with a view to their arraignment and trial. —

put them in public ward. (19) But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out, and said, (20) Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life. (21) And when they

heard *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison-

Alexander. The apostles. — Peter and others of them. It does not necessarily mean the whole body. In public ward. — This is specially mentioned, that there may be no doubt of the supernatural deliverance that night. — *Schaff.*

19. An angel of the Lord . . . opened the prison doors. — The frequency of angelic interference in the early days of the Church is remarkable. The word *angel* occurs twenty times in the Acts. — *Wordsworth.* As if for a protest against the actions of those who taught that "there was neither angel nor spirit." — *Cam. Bib.* It has been asked what was the purpose of this miraculous liberation of the apostles, since they were, nevertheless, brought before the tribunal after their escape, v. 27, and shamefully beaten, vs. 40, 41. This latter fact, however, by no means authorizes us to conclude that their deliverance had been effected without an object in view, for Luke expressly refers (v. 24) to the perplexity and confusion of mind which prevailed among the enemies of the apostles when the event occurred; with respect to them, at least, the object of the miracle was attained. Further it may be easily conceived that such a wonderful interposition of God must have added new power to the faith of the apostles, and this effect is plainly seen in v. 20, ff. Lastly, when the apostles voluntarily appear before the great council, vs. 26, 27, they occupy a very different position from that of prisoners who are carried from a place of confinement to the presence of the judges. — *Lange.*

20. Go ye and stand and speak in the temple. — In a public and conspicuous place. In this way there would be a most striking exhibition of their boldness; a proof that God had delivered them, and a manifestation of their purpose to obey God rather than man. — *Barnes.* All the words of this Life. — The use of the demonstrative pronoun is significant. The "life in Christ" which the apostles preach is that eternal life, which consists in knowing God (John 17: 3) and in which the angels are sharers. — *Ellicott.*

21. Entered into the temple about daybreak. — During a great part of the year in Palestine the heat becomes oppressive soon after sunrise. Much of our Lord's teaching was given very early, John 8: 2. The morning sacrifice was offered precisely at sunrise. The synagogue service is now often held before the sun is above the Mount of Olives. — *Cook.* Taught, i. e., preached, taught publicly, as the angel had directed them. — *Alexander.* The high priest came. — To the temple. This being a large collection of buildings and courts, covering many acres, the apostolic teaching might have been going on in Solomon's porch, and the high priest and the Sanhedrin, assembling in one of the side buildings

house to have them brought. (22) But the officers that came found them not in the prison; and they returned, and told, saying, (23) The prison-house we found shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors; but when we had opened we found no man within. (24) Now when the captain of the temple and the

chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would grow. (25) And there came one, and told them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people. (26) Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them, *but*

have known nothing of it. — *Abbott*. And all the senate of the children of Israel. — Meyer, Alford and Stier understand by these words, that a special meeting of elders was summoned to consult with the Sanhedrin in this difficult matter, but the word *senate*, which occurs only here, is constantly used in the second book of the Maccabees for the Sanhedrin. The meaning here seems to be that on this occasion there was a full meeting of the council, including all the elders who were members. — *Schaff*.

22. **Officers.** — Probably some of the temple guard (v. 26). — *Gray*.

23. **The prison-house we found shut**, i. e., shut fast or fastened, the Greek expression being stronger than our *closed*. **In all safety.** — In complete security or certainty. — *Alexander*. **The keepers standing at the doors.** — The meaning was, that there was full proof of divine interposition in the escape. — *Butler*.

24. **Captain of the temple.** — The Jewish commandant over the Jewish police guard who kept order on the temple grounds. — *Whedon*. **Chief priests.** — Heads of the twenty-four courses of priests, and titular high priests who had held office. — *Cook*. **They were much perplexed concerning them.** — That is, were perplexed concerning the report thus made to them. **Whereunto this would grow.** — That is, what would come of it. They were probably equally perplexed to understand how the apostles could have made their escape, and to foresee what would be the result thereof. Observe how the circumstance as attested by this examination demonstrated the supernatural character of the deliverance; the prison doors securely fastened, the prison guards before the door, and yet the prisoners released. — *Abbott*.

25. **The men . . . are in the temple standing and teaching the people.** — This *standing* implies the prominent and undaunted position which the apostles had taken up. They were not like prisoners who had escaped, and so were seeking a place to hide themselves; but like men whose work had been interfered with, and who, as soon as they were able, had come back to it again. — *Cam. Bib.*

26. **For they feared the people.** — One of the many indications in the New Testament that Christ and his truth were attractive to the common people and that the opposition was instigated and persecution inaugurated by interested rulers. Men are not by nature *wholly* averse to the truth; they are attracted by it, and are opposed to it only as it opposes their self-interest or their pride. — *Abbott*. **Lest they should**

without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. (27) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, (28) saying, We straitly charged you not to teach in this name, and behold, ye

have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. (29) But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men. (30) The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew, hanging him on a

be stoned. — The stoning, so often mentioned in the New Testament, is not mere pelting, as an act of popular violence, but an ancient theocratical expression of abhorrence for some act of blasphemy or treason to Jehovah. This form of capital punishment, for such it was, had been preferred to others in the law, because it made the death of the offender, not the act of a hated executioner, but that of all the people who were present, and especially of those who had acted as informers and witnesses. — *Alexander*.

27. **When they had brought them, i. e., to the judgment hall.** — *Cam. Bib.*

28. **We straitly charged you not to teach in this name, etc.** — A concealed dread underlies the whole of the high priest's accusation. He does not ask them how they came to be in the temple teaching that morning. He also avoids mentioning the name of Jesus, uttering no doubt with contempt the words, "this name," "your teaching," "this man's blood." The real charge was of disobedience to a decree of the Sanhedrin and an attempt to excite the people to rise against the Sanhedrists as the murderers of Jesus. — *Schaff*. **Ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.** — The Jerusalemists had not generally accepted the truth of Christianity; but all Jerusalem was full of the fame of the apostles' teaching. Not the *truth*, but the *report* of the truth, filled Jerusalem. — *Abbott*. **And intend to bring this man's blood upon us.** — To bring *one's blood* upon another is a phrase signifying to hold or to prove him guilty of murdering the innocent. — *Barnes*. You intend to hold us before the people, answerable for the blood of Jesus the Messiah of Israel; for this was the effect of Peter's preaching (ch. 2: 36; 3: 14; 5: 30; v. 30). Publicly, before Pilate, these same priests had taken Christ's blood upon them (Matt. 27: 25), agreeing to be answerable for it, both as before God and man. In a true sense the apostles would fain have brought this man's blood on the rulers for the cleansing of their sin (Rom. 3: 25; Ephes. 1: 7; Col. 1: 14); but they would not accept it. — *Abbott*.

29. **We must obey God rather men.** — The words are an assertion of the same general law of duty as that of chap. 4: 19, 20, but the command of the angel in v. 20 had given them a new significance. — *Ellicott*.

30. **The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew etc.** — Here again we have the favorite antithesis or contrast between Christ's treatment at the hands of God and man, which may be described as the key-note of this, as of the three previous discourses of Peter. The God of our fathers, our own national and covenant God. The our

tree. (31) Him did God exalt ¹ with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. (32) And

we are witnesses ² of these ³ things; ⁴ and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

¹ Or, at. ² Some ancient authorities add in him. ³ Gr. sayings. ⁴ Some ancient authorities read and God hath given the Holy Ghost to them that obey him.

identifies the speaker and the hearers as belonging to the same race and believing the same Scriptures. — *Alexander*. **Raised up Jesus.** — This is understood to mean "raised him from the dead," by *Chrysostom*, *Erasmus*, *Meyer*, and *Alexander*. But (as *de Wette* says) it suits better the progress of the thought to take it in the sense of "raised up of the seed of David," as in ch. 13: 23; see also 3: 22, and the same word in Luke 1: 69. So *Calvin*, *Bengel*, and *Lechler*. — *J. F. & B.* **Whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree.** — He brings clearly before them the double act, (1) murder, for they coerced the death sentence from Pilate; (2) the means employed, the disgraceful Gentile cross. — *Abbott*.

31. Him. — Literally, *this* (one), i. e., the very one whom you thus crucified. **Exalt**, or as Tyndale has it, *lift up*. **With his right hand**, by the exertion of his power, and to his right hand, i. e., to a share in that power and in the dignity connected with it. — *Alexander*. **To be a Prince and a Saviour.** — A Prince to whom all Israel owes obedience, and the one by whom you must be saved from your sins. — *Schaff*. The title *Prince*, or *King*, was one which was well known as applied to the Messiah. — *Burnes*. While Jesus dispenses his gifts as a "*Prince*," the gifts themselves are those of a "*Saviour*." — "repentance and the remission of sins." — *J. F. & B.* **To give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.** — The object of the exaltation. The death, resurrection, ascension, and ever-living intercession are all part of one atoning work, having all the one object, the redemption of men from sin. — *To give repentance* is not merely to give an opportunity to exercise it, i. e., to afford pardon to the repentant, but to impart the disposition to repentance. Both repentance and faith are represented in the New Testament as *gifts* of God, that all may be from him (John 1: 16; 16: 7, 8; Acts 3: 16; Rom. 2: 4; Ephes. 2: 8). *The remission of sins* is not merely pardon, i. e., relief from the punishment of sin, but the cleansing of the soul from sin itself. — *Abbott*.

32. We are witnesses of these things. — That is the death on the cross and the ascension; but they were witnesses in a higher sense of their Master's exaltation, as conscious of the Holy Ghost, who he promised should descend upon them when once he had ascended, and so did at Pentecost. — *Schaff*. **And so is the Holy Ghost.** — The Holy Ghost was a witness to the truth of redemption, both by the special gifts conferred upon the apostles and early disciples — gifts of tongues, miracles, etc. (ch. 2: 1-7; 10: 45; 19: 6; Mark 16: 20); and by the internal witness afforded to the believer in his own experience. — *Abbott*. **Whom God hath given to them that obey him.** — Thus the disciples declare that the obedience to God which at the outset (v. 29) they had

proclaimed as their bounden duty, was also the reason why the Holy Ghost had been bestowed upon them, and leaving it to be gathered that what God has done he will do again, and bestows gifts of grace on those who are willing to obey him. — *Cam. Bib.*

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — Such a dreadful judgment as that which struck down Ananias and Sapphira could not fail to produce marked and immediate results. One natural effect of it was to cut a sharper line of demarcation between the disciples and the body of the Jewish people. To the former it gave a startling proof of the nearness of God, and taught the perilous responsibility involved in their profession of Christianity; on the latter it impressed a wholesome respect for the new faith. A sort of sanctity hung visibly about the Divine society which held its meetings in Solomon's porch, which warned off idle intrusion. It was not, as now, that whoever was nothing else called himself a Christian. There was then a realized significance in the profession of faith. No one presumed to attach himself to the disciples without believing; "howbeit the people magnified them;" the common people paid them all reverence and honor. "Many signs and wonders" were wrought by the apostles; and more even than before were believing souls "added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." All this took time; it was not accomplished in a week or a month. It is a mistake to suppose that these events related in the first five chapters of the Acts were all crowded into a few months. Many fall into this error. The growth of the infant Church was a much more gradual thing. Her times of trial, recorded by her historian, were separated by considerable intervals of peaceful progress over which he passes more lightly. The Church was allowed for some years to consolidate herself and loosen herself from the Jewish state before her members were scattered by the violent blast of a general persecution. Those general descriptions of the Church's condition, by which Luke separates the particular incidents he records (2: 42-47; 4: 32-35; 5: 12-16, 42), are obviously meant to cover considerable intervals of time; but how long the interval may have been in any case we have no means of determining. There is, however, an internal probability that the whole covered a period of five or six years, from A. D. 30 to 36, and that the interval of great power, popular favor, and large increase, indicated in verses 12-16, must have been of considerable duration. Its interruption is the subject of our lesson.

Lesson Topics. — I. The Apostles Imprisoned. II. The Apostles Liberated. III. The Apostles before the Sanhedrin.

I. THE APOSTLES IMPRISONED (vs. 17, 18). — This new attack was not only preceded, but also occasioned by the wonderful success which had attended the labors of the apostles (vs.

12-16). It was not only after the number of the disciples was so multiplied and the people so impressed by the miracles, but for that very reason, that this new persecution arose. The apostles' success inflamed the passion of the Jewish rulers, and called down upon them their indignation. "They were filled with jealousy, and laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward." These men had been the persecutors of Christ when he was upon the earth, and they are faithful still to their conduct towards him; persecuting the servant as they had before persecuted the Lord. That one new feature to which reference has been made in a previous lesson appears still in this persecution. It is, more distinctly than in the Gospels, a Sadducean hostility. Among the antagonists of our Lord, while his bodily presence was with men, the Pharisee is unquestionably the more conspicuous. But no sooner has he left the earth than the Sadducees come to the front as assailants of his Gospel. This is easily accounted for. It was natural that a Gospel built upon a resurrection should irritate most strongly the sect which denied that great hope of man. While it was a mere tenet of doctrine they bore it with composure; but when it became a statement of fact it was at once a struggle for life and death. These Sadducees, while they were avowedly regardless of the future, and despised everything in religion that bordered on spirituality, prided themselves on their superior philosophy and broader liberality. They were the "free-thinkers" of their time. One would suppose that the new truths would be sure to receive candid treatment from men who were "liberals" by profession. But, no. They could not deny the truth, attested as it was by the power of God; they would not accept it; there was nothing left but to have recourse to the power which was in their hands to crush the whole proceedings. As it was then, so it has ever been. Nothing could well be more uncandid, narrow, and intolerant than the so-called liberalism of "free-thinkers."

II. THE APOSTLES LIBERATED (vs. 19-24).—This arrest embraced all the apostles, and, like that of Peter and John, it took place late in the day, with a view to an early examination next morning. They were cast into the public prison for the night. It was a night of wonders to them.

1. *They obtained help from God.* "An angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out." This was not done with the intention of extricating them out of a difficulty, for it did not postpone their trial even for a day. Its purpose was to strengthen their faith in the gracious concern of their Lord on their behalf, and in his power to protect them if in his wisdom he saw that it was best. This was for the apostles amid the trials which were to follow the all-important point. It is a matter of comparatively small moment what suffering and trial it pleases God to call his people to endure for their own discipline, or for the advancement of his cause in the earth; but it is a matter of the highest importance that they should not lose heart and sink under the suffering and trial—

that they should not lose their faith in the love and power of God. So on the eve of a very trying day, their first day of actual physical suffering for Jesus' sake, the apostles were strengthened and comforted by an angel from their Lord. There was in this incident a lesson for the persecutors also. This was not an ordinary rescue. The escaped men are standing in the temple, attending to their great business. The most obvious explanation, to the mind of a Jew of that day, would be that they were miraculously delivered. If the rulers had been at all susceptible to spiritual influences this midnight deliverance might have warned them back from the fresh persecution upon which they had determined, and upon which they were now entering.

2. *They received direction from God.* "Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Such was the command given through the angel. It is grand and inspiring in all its terms, and must have waked up all the manliness in the souls of these apostles, as well as called all their faith in God and the Gospel into lively exercise. "Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple." Go back to the very place where you were arrested; where old prejudice will rouse the strongest opposition; where the people assemble in largest concourse; and there "stand and speak to the people," — not to any particular class of men, but to all who will listen, high and low, priest and peasant, Pharisee and Sadducee, — all alike. Speak "*all* the words of this Life." Proclaim, not a partial, but a whole Gospel — not a few selected words, but "*all* the words of this Life." Here is a summary and sublime description of the Gospel. It is a record of words embodying the truth of God — words which generate, nurture, develop, and perfect the true life of humanity. How grand is all this, and how inspiring! The liberated men hastened to obey. "They entered into the temple about daybreak, and taught." They were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. They "conferred not with flesh and blood." As the people began to assemble in the morning, they were there to meet them. They were delivered from prison for this purpose. They were not brought forth in order that they might retire to solitude and safety, but that they might glorify God.

III. THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (vs. 25-32). — Unacquainted with what had transpired during the night, and not even aware of what was just then taking place in the temple, the Sanhedrin came together. The officers who had been sent to conduct the prisoners into the presence of the court soon returned bearing the astounding intelligence that they had found all right at the prison itself, but that the prisoners were no longer there. This news must have confounded them with astonishment and disappointment. The previous night they had committed the apostles, as they supposed, to safe custody, intending to have them arraigned in their presence, in order to make out such a charge as would legally terminate their ministry. The plans of this august assembly were formed,

and their determinations, perhaps, fixed. The morning comes. They meet in all the ceremony of office. The prisoners are sent for, and the word comes back, the prison is all right, but the prisoners are gone. What miserable victims of disappointment these rulers must have felt themselves to be! What a dark and chilling shadow was thrown upon the dignity of their state, and the pomp of their office! No wonder they were filled with apprehension. When they heard the words of those who had returned from the prison, "they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would grow." These words do not so much express their wonder at what had happened, as their fear at what would be the issue of the whole—the terrible bearing upon themselves. And well they might fear. Their authority was disregarded. Heaven had thwarted their plans by a striking display of miraculous power. While they were lost in their perplexity, "there came one and told them, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people." They were at once taken and brought before the court, "but without violence; for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned."

1. *The charge brought against them* (v. 27, 28). They are now, at last, before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest, the president of the court, addresses them. The charge, as might be expected, is grounded on the apostles' disregard of the authority of the rulers, as shown in their continuing to preach, when they had been commanded to cease. "We straitly charged you not to teach in this name," etc. They had so commanded (4: 17-21), but the apostles, with a sublime heroism, had notified them on the spot that they could not obey them, and in the fear of God had set their mandates at defiance. This, aside from the nature of the doctrines taught, wounded their official pride, and filled them with anger. This address of the high priest is significant for what it omits. There is not a word about the wonder of the night before. The first inquiries, one would think, should be with reference to the escape. But that is entirely ignored. They dread to question on that subject, and they pass on to the business of the day as if no such thing had happened. This omission speaks volumes concerning their state of mind that morning. Then the references to Christ in the address are significant. The high priest, either from fear or shame, hatred or contempt, or some combination of them, will not mention the name of Jesus, but refers to him as "this name," "this man's blood." Furthermore, this speech is remarkable for what it admits. It bears testimony to the success of the apostles, and the progress of the truth. "Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." They would have ignored or denied this fact if they could, but circumstances wrested it from their reluctant lips. Finally, the betrayal of fear in the language is very striking. "And intend to bring this man's blood upon us." This must have been the result of a sudden and bewildering attack of conscience. We begin to understand now why they did not ques-

tion the apostles as to their escape. There was enough of wonder in the occurrence to suggest, even to them, whose hand had possibly undone the bolts. They are very far from being at ease. Once they had dared, in the fury of their malignant rage, to cry, "His blood be upon us." Now they deprecate that as the direst of judgments.

2. *Their defence* (vs. 29-32). It is made by Peter, who as usual is the spokesman for the college of apostles. In this bold and manly defence he enunciated a grand principle, "We must obey God rather than men." This principle is of universal application and perpetual obligation. It had been announced by Peter before in the presence of the rulers (4:19-20. See Lesson VII). He declared a sublime fact, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus." This is the great crowning fact, the monarch miracle, of Christianity. The apostles always made it prominent in their preaching; and Paul (1 Cor. 15:12-19) does not hesitate to stake the whole system on the truth of this great doctrine. Peter makes an awful charge. "Whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree." Here he charges, as he had done more than once before, the crime of the crucifixion home upon them. He closes the defence with a glorious proclamation (vs. 31, 32). There are two things about this defence in general that ought to be noted. See how the apostles cling to the great facts of Christianity on all occasions. They never think of departing from them for the sake of a system, or for the sake of novelty, or for the sake of anything else. The defence here is substantially the same as when they were arraigned on a previous occasion before the same body. In both the great facts of Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation to be a Prince and a Saviour are made prominent. The apostles were certain on these points. The other thing to be noted is the superiority to the fear of man, the inflexible fidelity to the truth, the more than human heroism of Peter as he stands in the presence of the great council of his nation, and thus defends himself and his brethren.

MARCH 11, 1883.]

LESSON X.

[ACTS 6:1-15.]

THE SEVEN CHOSEN.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Seven men of good report, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom."—Verse 3.

TIME.—A.D. 31-37. **PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(1) Now in these days, when the number of the disciples

1. **Now in these days.**—An indefinite expression, sometimes relating to an interval of a few days (as in ch. 1:15), sometimes to one of many years (as in Matt. 3:1), but always implying some connection between

was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the ¹Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. (2) And the twelve called the multitude of the dis-

ciples unto them, and said, It is not ²fit that we should forsake the word of God, and ³serve tables. (3) ⁴Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and

¹ Gr. *Hellenists*. ² Gr. *pleasing*. ³ Or, *minister to tables*. ⁴ Some ancient authorities read, *But, brethren, look ye out from among you*.

what precedes and follows. It may here be understood to mean, "while they were thus engaged in preaching Christ" (see 5: 42) — *Alexander*. **When the number of the disciples was multiplying.** — "When the disciples were growing numerous." — *J. F. & B.* **There arose a murmuring,** or *whispering*, any suppressed talking, sometimes indicative of fear (John 7: 12, 13), but commonly, as here, of discontent (Phil. 2: 14; 1 Pet. 4: 9). **Of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews.** — *Grecians* (*Hellenists*, not *Greeks* (*Hellenes*), but Jews using the Greek language in their worship, and therefore applied to the whole class of foreign or Greek-speaking Jews, as distinguished from the *Hebrews*, or natives of Palestine, and others who used the Hebrew Scriptures, and spoke the Aramaic dialect. — *Alexander*. **Because their widows were neglected,** or "overlooked." The imperfect tense conveys the idea of "getting overlooked" by those whom the apostles employed to distribute the liberality of the Christian community, and who it would appear, were of the "Hebrew" class, as being probably the most numerous. — **In the daily ministration.** — The daily distribution either of alms or of food; probably the latter. — *J. F. & B.*

2. **Called the multitude of the disciples together.** — It is no more necessary to suppose that the entire number, five or six thousand, attended, than that all the citizens attend every town meeting. It was a public gathering of the Church, to which all could come who were so inclined. The open courtyard of any of the large houses of Jerusalem would afford a convenient place of meeting. — *Abbott*. **It is not fit.** — Literally, *it is not pleasing*, as in chap. 12: 3. The word implies that they had undertaken a burdensome duty, not for their own pleasure, because they liked it, but for the good of the community. — *Ellicott*. **Forsake the word of God,** i. e., the duty of dispensing and proclaiming it, the propagation of the new religion. — *Alexander*. **And serve tables.** — The word was used for the "tables" of money-changers, as in Matt. 21: 12; John 2: 15, and was, therefore, equally appropriate whether we think of the relief as being given in money or in kind. — *Ellicott*.

3. **Seven men of good report.** — Literally, "men testified to;" that is, bearing a good reputation (so ch. 10: 22; and more explicitly, 1 Tim. 3: 7). — *J. F. & B.* **Full of the Spirit.** — Not full of miraculous gifts, which would have been no qualification for the duties required, but *spiritually gifted*. — *J. F. & B.* Men who were eminently under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or who were of distinguished piety. **And of wisdom.** — Prudence, or skill, to make a wise and equable distribution. — *Barnes*.

of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. (4) But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. (5) And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and

Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: (6) whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them.

(7) And the word of God increased: and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

4. In prayer, and in the ministry of the word. — "Prayer" includes the public worship of the Church in all its various developments, as well as private prayer and intercession; the "ministry of the word," all forms of teaching. — *Ellicott*. The word rendered *ministry* here is the same as that rendered *serve* in v. 2. The apostles will serve the word of God, and leave to others to serve the charities of the Church. — *Abbott*.

5. And they chose Stephen. — A man who soon showed (chap. 7) that he was every way qualified for his office, and fitted to defend also the cause of the Lord Jesus. This man had the distinguished honor of being the first Christian martyr. — *Barnes*. **A man full of faith.** — The faith alluded to is that trust in Jesus as the Redeemer which is the root of all Christian virtues. **Philip.** — Well known afterwards as the "apostle" of Samaria (Acts 8). It was this Philip who instructed the minister of the Ethiopian Queen Candace; he is mentioned again as dwelling at Caesarea with his four prophet-daughters (Acts 21: 8), and seems to have been generally known as the "evangelist." — *Schaff*. **Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, and Parmenas,** are names recorded only here. — *Alexander*. **Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch.** — That is, a Gentile by birth who had embraced the Jewish religion, and submitted to the rite of circumcision before he became a Christian. It would appear that Nicholas was the only proselyte, and that the rest were either Palestinian or Hellenistic Jews. — *Gloag*.

6. Whom they set before the apostles. — For their approval. **And when they had prayed.** — For guidance in the final decision (ch. 1: 24, 25), and for divine blessing on those that were chosen (ch. 13: 2, 3). — *Abbott*. **They laid their hands on them.** — The imposition of hands, as practised in appointing persons to an office, was a symbol of the impartation of the gifts and graces which they needed to qualify them for the office. It was of the nature of a prayer that God would bestow the necessary gifts, rather than a pledge that they were actually conferred. — *Hackett*.

7. The word of God increased. — In power in the Church, and hence in extent, by addition to the Church. The nature of the increase is explained by the subsequent clauses of the verse, which define its effects. This was both an evidence that harmony was restored and an effect of that harmony. — *Abbott*. **A great company of the priests.** According to Ezra (2: 36-39), the priests amounted to four thousand two hundred and eighty-nine at the time of the return from Babylon,

(8) And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. (9) But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called the *synagogue* of the Libertines, and of the Cyreneans, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. (10) And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake. (11) Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against*

They must have been still more numerous at this period. — *Hackett*. **Were obedient to the faith.** — That is, submitted to the Gospel, as a system of belief and practice. — *Alexander*.

8. **Stephen full of grace and power.** — *Grace*, not faith (A. V.). It is here divine grace, and includes faith as one of the chief graces or free gifts of God's Spirit. *Power* is the divine power promised by Jesus Christ to his disciples in ch. 1: 8, as manifested by signs and wonders, and also in the boldness and effectiveness of Stephen's preaching. — *Abbott*.

9. **But there arose.** — The teaching and work of Stephen struck a new chord in the heart of the people. Many who had been deaf before were now constrained to listen. A new tide of success apparently had commenced to flow, but the success stirred up new enemies. — *Schaff*. **Certain of them that were of the synagogue called, etc.** — An exact classification of these synagogues, which are mentioned here as the scenes of Stephen's disputations, is perhaps impossible; the Greek is perplexed, and the precise definition of each of these Jewish congregations somewhat doubtful. Some have thought that only two synagogues are to be understood, one for the first three names, another for the remaining two. It is far more likely that five synagogues were intended. The Talmudists tell us that there were four hundred and sixty, some of them say four hundred and eighty synagogues in Jerusalem. — *Cook*. **Libertines.** — Roman Jews whose fathers were carried captive to Rome by Pompey about 53 B. C. Many of them had been set free, whence their name. **Cyrenians.** — Cyrene was a great city in North Africa. Josephus relates that one-fourth of its inhabitants were Jews. — *Schaff*. **The Alexandrians,** were from Alexandria, on the Mediterranean, twelve miles from the mouth of the Nile, a famous philosophical and literary centre. **Cilicia and Asia,** were Roman provinces; the latter including Mysia, Lydia, Cana, and Phrygia. **Disputing with Stephen.** — *With* does not necessarily imply that he entered into any public debate or discussion with them. It is equally consistent with the account to suppose that he preached the truth affirmatively, and that they opposed, but could not successfully resist him. Comp. ch. 13: 45. — *Abbott*.

10. **The wisdom.** — This properly refers to his knowledge of the Scriptures; his skill in what the Jews esteemed to be wisdom — acquaintance with their sacred writings, opinions, etc. — *Barnes*. Stephen met the doctors of the synagogues on their own ground, showing how marvelously the allusions and promises contained in the law and the prophets were fulfilled in Jesus. — *Schaff*. **And the Spirit.** — The analogy of v. 3 precludes the vague and somewhat modern sense of *spirit*, *i. e.*, energy

God. (12) And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and seized him, and brought him into the council, (13) and set up false witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: (14) for we have

heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us. (15) And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

or vigor, as well as the more genuine but lower one of intellect or sense, and requires that of Holy Spirit, if not as a person, as an influence. He spoke *with wisdom*, for he spoke *by inspiration*. — *Alexander*.

11. **Then they suborned men.** — To *suborn* in law means to procure a person to take such a false oath as constitutes perjury. — *Webster*. It has substantially this sense here. It means that they induced them to declare that which was false, or to bring a false accusation against him. — *Barnes*. **Blasphemous words.** — *Blasphemy* under the Jewish law was any endeavor to turn away the allegiance of the people from the one true God. **Against God.** — To speak against Moses was equivalent to speaking against God, because God spake through Moses (John 9: 29). — *Abbott*.

12. **Stirred up the people.** — They *excited* the people, or alarmed their fears, as had been done before when they sought to put the Lord Jesus to death. — *Barnes*. **Came upon . . . seized . . . brought.** — The words imply a taking him by surprise and hurrying him by force into the presence of the Sanhedrin. — *Whedon*.

13. **And set up false witnesses.** — They perhaps quoted before the Sanhedrin the very words of Stephen, but took them out of their original context, distorted them, evidently represented him as unceasingly assailing the temple and the holy Jewish rites, and held him up as a fanatical enemy of all that the devout Israelite looked upon as holy. — *Schaff*. **This holy place, i. e.,** the city of Jerusalem, or more precisely the temple, **and the law, i. e.,** the theocratical and ceremonial system, of which it was the visible heart and centre. — *Alexander*.

14. **And shall change the customs, etc.** — The words seem to have been used in a half-technical sense as including the whole complex system of the Mosaic law, its ritual, its symbolism, its laws and rules of life, circumcision, the Sabbath, the distinction of clean and unclean meats (chaps. 15: 1; 21: 21; 26: 3; 28: 17). — *Ellicott*.

15. **All that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him.** — As they would naturally in expectation of what he was about to say in his defence. — *Cam. Bib.* **Saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.** — *Comp. Exod. 33: 35; Luke 9: 29.* Whether here the shining was a supernatural brightness, a special and divine radiance, or a natural effect of his own divinely inspired peace and joy, is not an important question. In either case it was the direct result of the indwelling of God with him, the fulfilment of the promise of Christ (John 14: 23, 27). That the manifestation of this inward life was not without its effect on the

council, is indicated by the mildness of the high priest's question, in striking contrast with the high priest's treatment of Christ (Matt. 27: 62, 63, 65), and Paul (ch. 23: 2); and by the fact that the council heard Stephen's defence until his outburst of indignation at the close. Contrast 22: 22. — *Abbott.*

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — There were two classes of Jews, who, having embraced Christianity, made up the infant church at Jerusalem, — the Jews of Palestine, or "Hebrews," and the Jews of the Dispersion, called Grecians, or Hellenists. Before the captivity (B. C. 586) the Jews had dwelt as far as possible alone, fearing and shunning Gentile contact. After that event they spread from Babylonia, whence they were carried over all the East. The numbers who returned to the Holy Land under Zerubbabel, and later under Ezra, were comparatively small. The larger part remained abroad, moving about in Gentile lands wherever openings for trade were to be found. Contact for centuries with pagan nations made these "Jews of the Dispersion," by birth, language, habit, and association — in fact in all except descent and religion — Greeks rather than Jews. In the meantime, the home Jews, who continued to live in Palestine recoiled from defiling contact with foreigners, grew prouder, narrower, and more rigid; hardened, in short, into Pharisaism by way of needful reaction, or under an instinct of self-preservation. There was, as we may well suppose, little genuine sympathy between these two classes. There was always a tendency on the part of the Palestine Jews to pride themselves on their orthodoxy, and to suspect, as well as dislike, their countrymen who had taken on Gentile manners. On the other hand, it came very natural to the foreign Jews to look down on stay-at-home and old-fashioned Hebrews as narrow or bigoted, as well as ignorant. From the very first both classes were represented in the Christian Church. A grave danger threatened her if her members imported into her communion such mutual jealousies as these; and this "murmuring" about the widow's rations meant, at bottom, nothing less. These facts must be borne in mind in order to an understanding, not of the incident of our lesson only, but of the whole subsequent history.

Lesson Topics. — I. The Choice of the Seven. II. The Ministry of Stephen.

I. THE CHOICE OF THE SEVEN (vs. 1-5). — In this lesson we behold the infant Church facing new difficulties, and adapting herself to a new emergency.

1. The reason for the action. That absolute Christian socialism which prevailed immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost had been discarded as impracticable. A modified form of it, however, which involved no real or enforced abolition of the rights of property, had been adopted, as is evident from the language of Peter in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, as well

as from that of the inspired historian (4:32). Under the influence of the belief that property was given in trust for the good of the whole community, the wealthier members were accustomed to make large donations of money to the apostles and their deputies, which was distributed in the form of a daily allowance to the poor. Some inequality in the distribution of this daily allowance, arising either from partiality or carelessness, gave rise to murmurs on the part of the Hellenist members of the church against those who were Hebrews. And if, as seems likely, the daily ministration had been delegated by the apostles to Hebrew deputies, it can hardly be matter of surprise that the Hellenist widows, many of whom might be comparatively little known, were neglected. The dispute had not got beyond murmuring; but the plaintive sighing of the wind too often foretokens the storm; and so the apostles were wise in promptly dealing with the case. What was to be done? The temporal necessities of the poor members could not be neglected. It was the duty of the church then, as it is the duty of the church now, to look after the temporal as well as the spiritual needs of her members. In this the Saviour has left her an example; and to all his disciples comes the command to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Nor could this duty be attended to by the apostles in person without neglecting more important concerns (vs. 2, 4). They felt it to be right and proper that they should give themselves continually to their all-absorbing spiritual duties, and let others attend to the temporal concerns of the church. Hence they "called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and, after declaring the defectiveness of the existing regulation, and their own inability to undertake the service, proposed the selection of seven men, to be appointed "over this business." The proposition was received with a unanimity characteristic of the Christianity of the first century rather than of the nineteenth; for "the saying pleased the whole multitude."

2. *The qualities to be sought in those chosen* (v. 3). There is a deep-seated significance in the qualities by which these officers were to be distinguished. They must be men of "good report" — must have an established reputation among their fellows for consistency and integrity; they must be "full of the Spirit" — men entirely consecrated to God, living to his glory, and filled with his Spirit; and they must be men of "wisdom" — men of practical sagacity and business tact, who could weigh the merits of cases, and act with judgment and equity. This is a high standard of qualification. Let it be remembered that the office they were to undertake was secular — to "serve tables," — and one that was boldly marked out by the apostles as vastly inferior to their own. With what deep meaning, then, are these words charged; and how vivid the witness which they bear to sanctity and responsibility of *any* position in the Church! The honor and prosperity of any church depends, to a great extent, upon the purity and fitness of its officers. Here are the qualities required. Not one of these qualities, though in the highest

style, will supersede the necessity of the other two, and equip a man for church position. No two of them in combination will suffice without the third. Piety will not compensate for the absence of good reputation; nor is a man eligible for office in the church whose heart and reputation are good, but who is lacking in wisdom. The central qualification is that a man should be "full of the Spirit;" but this, like Moses on the hill, must ever have two supporters — "good report" and "wisdom." Seven men were found in the infant Church who possessed these high qualifications, and they were unanimously chosen. If anything definite may be gathered from Grecian names, all the seven were Hellenists, or, at all events, connected with that party. The duties of their office are sufficiently defined in the history. The result of the action was all that could be desired (v. 7).

The church has it in her power to provide for each emergency as it arises. Her Lord has left her no prearranged system of officialism, ceremonial, or of government. He did not profess to legislate beforehand for the details of a kingdom which was meant to be as wide as mankind and as enduring as history. It is folly to seek for a specific form of church-polity in the New Testament. The silence of the Great Teacher on the subject, the eccentricities of many of the churches under direct apostolic control, and the experiments which were made, successfully and unsuccessfully, clearly indicate that the polity of the Christian Church, while regulated by certain invariable principles, is, nevertheless, elastic, and not tied down to any primitive and inexorable type. What Sir James Mackintosh says of governments generally may be predicated of that of the Church: "Governments are not framed after a model, but all their parts and powers grow out of occasional acts, prompted by some urgent expediency, . . . which, in the course of time, coalesce and harden into usage. Government may be, in some degree, reduced to system, but it cannot flow from it." A grand distinction of the dispensation of the Spirit is *freedom*. The ceremonial law, the province of which was strictly local, was unbending in its minutest and most mechanical details. In contrast, the Gospel, in which the Spirit of the Lord is, is the sphere of liberty. Its moral discipline is invariably the same, uninfluenced by clime, or temperament, or age. But its mechanical discipline is not so restricted, and cannot be. The New Testament, therefore, while furnishing explicit declarations as to what the *spirit* of our church-polity should be, is silent as to its *form*.

II. THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN (vs. 8-15). — Of the seven men chosen, two only, Stephen and Philip, the Evangelist, are known in history. We have here to do with the former; we will come upon the latter further on.

1. *The character and work of Stephen.* His high character is attested by the fact that he was first among the men who were chosen by the unanimous voice of "the multitude of the disciples," as those who were "of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom;" and by the further fact that he is noted by the

historian, in connection with the record of his election, as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." As if all this were not sufficient, Luke introduces his account of Stephen's brief ministry, with the additional statement that he was "full of grace and power." It would be difficult to conceive how a loftier idea of his character could be conveyed to us.

Stephen's office was secular, and, doubtless, he gave himself to the discharge of its duties with zeal and prudence, but he did not confine himself to routine duty. Important as was this service of superintending the almsgiving of the Church, he felt that the responsibilities devolving upon him as a servant of Christ were of wider range. It is a wrong and disastrous notion that the spirit of evangelism is to distinguish only the minister of Christ. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not confined to ministers, and the responsibility of bringing men to Jesus does not rest with them alone. There is one department of Christian service in which all the members of the Church are to exert themselves to the utmost,; and it is the noblest department, *the saving of souls*. The first developments of the faith and zeal of Stephen are seen in the working of great wonders and miracles among the people. He appears to have been the first of the non-apostolic disciples whose faith was thus distinguished. His labor, as an Evangelist, seems to have been chiefly among the foreign Jews. Being a Hellenist, he was thus far more fitted for carrying the great controversy beyond the circle of the Palestinian Jews than were the apostles. For, although led by the Spirit into the truth, and comprehending the nature of that spiritual worship which is founded in faith, they were still unable, by reason of education and inveterate prejudice, fully to understand the consequences flowing from it in relation to the ritual of Judaism. They frequented the temple as usual, and were almost as bigoted in their adherence to the external forms of the Jewish worship as were their unbelieving kinsmen. But Stephen, accustomed to the somewhat liberal culture of the Hellenists, and unfettered by that strict nationality, which, as yet, characterized the apostles, was led more readily to comprehend a system whose worship was to be superior to locality and every other externalism, and whose faith was to have no visible and material centre of union. The dissolution of the temple and its service, and the advent of a period when spirituality and truth were to transcend all forms, were apprehended the more readily by his Hellenist mind.

2. *His arrest and the charge brought against him.* How long Stephen was permitted to continue his wonderful ministry we have no means of knowing. It was suddenly brought to a close by his arrest upon a false accusation. The three synagogues whose hostility he specially provoked were all Hellenist synagogues — a synagogue of Roman Jews, *libertini*, as they were called, being freedmen — a synagogue of African Jews — and a synagogue of Jews from proconsular Asia and Cilicia. From the character of the charge brought against Stephen, we may gather the staple of his teaching. A protest against the Phari-

said notions of the permanency and sufficiency of Judaism, and a declaration of the transitoriness of the Law and the Temple, as well as of the freedom and universality of the new and better covenant, were evidently the groundwork of the dispute. It is not improbable that Saul of Tarsus, who is first mentioned in connection with the death of Stephen, and who in later days invariably followed this track of reasoning, was one of the disputants, inasmuch as he was a member of the Cilician synagogue. "Not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake," his adversaries having "suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God," seized Stephen, and dragged him before the Sanhedrin. On appearing before this august tribunal he maintained the serenity of conscious right. Far from being dismayed in the presence of so much antagonistic power, so full was he of holy joy and comfort that they "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." This was a sufficient answer to the false accusation. That face, beaming with an incorruptible honesty, an invincible courage, an exhaustless love, and a heavenly joy, was in itself a mighty refutation of the charge. The face is the mirror of the soul. Great thoughts, holy emotions, and lofty purposes transfigure the countenance into lofty beauty.

MARCH 18, 1883.]

LESSON XI. [ACTS 7:54-60; 8:1-4.]

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." — Rev. 2:10.

TIME. — A.D. 37. **PLACE.** — Jerusalem.

LESSON-TEXT AND NOTES.

(54) Now when they had cut to the heart, and they heard these things, they were gnashed on him with their

54. When they heard these things. — This discourse of Stephen's (vs. 1-53), it may be with special reference to the conclusion (51-53). **They were cut to the heart.** — They were exceedingly enraged and indignant. The whole course of the speech had been such as to excite their anger, and now they could restrain themselves no longer. — *Barnes*. The strict meaning of the verb describes the action of a saw, as in Heb. 11:37. Used figuratively, it seems to imply a more lacerating pain than the "pricked to the heart" of chap. 2:37, producing, not repentance but the frenzy of furious anger. — *Ellicott*. **They gnashed on him with their teeth.** — The sting of Stephen's reproachful words moved them to an irrepressible fury. The expression "to gnash with the teeth" is frequently used in the Old Testament to signify furious rage; see Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12. — *Schaff*.

teeth. (55) But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God: (56) and said,

Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (57) But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon

55. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost.—The divine presence grew the clearer as the human enmity grew stronger and more furious. —*Abbott*. Grace is given as our necessities require; though Stephen was a man ordinarily richly endowed, and full of the Holy Ghost, yet his capacity is now increased, and a larger portion bestowed, preparing him for the painful but glorious scene to follow. —*Peirce*. **Looked up steadfastly into heaven.**—*Into heaven* does not necessarily imply that he could see the sky from where he stood, but merely that he looked up towards it; all the rest was preternatural, ecstatic vision. As such, the process was, of course, inscrutable and indescribable. In what sense, or in what way, Stephen *saw* this glorious sight, whether by a miraculous extension of his bodily vision, or by mere removal of all intervening obstacles, or by the presentation of a visionary object, or by a miraculous impression on his mind, there is no need of inquiring, as the actual effect must still have been the same, and must have seemed so even to himself. It is enough to know that this effect was supernatural and wrought upon him by the Holy Ghost, and also that it was confined to Stephen as appears from the conduct of his judges, recorded in the next verse. **The glory of God, i. e., a sensible manifestation of his presence. Jesus standing on the right hand of God.**—As the post of honor and coequal power. —*Alexander*. The Lord is always described, both in his own statements (Matt. 26: 64), and in those of the apostles and evangelists (e. g., Eph. 1: 20; Mark 16: 19), as *sitting* at the right hand of God. What is implied by the fact that Jesus is *standing* at the right hand of God? Doubtless that he has arisen, and stands ready to receive and welcome this faithful witness (comp. v. 59). —*Lange*.

56. The Son of man.—The phrase, *Son of man*, is used by Daniel prophetically of the Messiah, and by Christ of himself, but never in the New Testament by the sacred writers in speaking of him, except here and in Rev. 1: 13; 14: 14. Why is it used here? Stephen impelled by the Holy Spirit, employs the very same words in which Jesus himself had before this same council foretold his second coming in glory (Matt. 26: 64), and thus he indicates to them that the glorification of the Just One, whom they have betrayed and murdered, had already begun. Moreover, he thus emphasizes the truth that it is Christ in his mediatorial capacity, Christ the Saviour, Christ with all his human sympathies and affections, Christ the *Son of Man*, no less than the Son of God, who is ever at the right hand of God, and who there awaits the coming of his own unto him. —*Abbott*.

57. Then they cried out.—The exasperation of the hearers reached its height, and could no longer be controlled when Stephen bore witness, in accordance with the vision, to the exaltation and glorification of Jesus. They began to utter loud cries, in order that he might not be

him with one accord; (58) and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. (59) And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *the Lord*, and saying,

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. (60) And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (1) And Saul was consenting unto his death.

understood, and stopped their ears so that they might not hear his supposed blasphemies. — *Lange*. **Stopped their ears.** — This act, which is a natural expression of unwillingness to hear, appears to have been practised, both by Jews and Gentiles, as a special gesture of abhorrence on the utterance of blasphemy or impious language. The tumultuous excitement here described may seem incredible in a grave national assembly, and especially in one of a religious character. But it is perfectly in keeping with the treatment of Paul, and of our Lord himself, before the same tribunal. — *Alexander*. It is apparent that a judicial decision had not yet been formally announced, and, further, that no sentence pronounced by the Sanhedrin had yet been submitted to the Roman procurator, without whose sanction the Jews could not inflict capital punishment (John 18 : 31). In these respects the proceedings were unjustifiable and illegal. — *Lange*.

58. Cast him out of the city, and stoned him. — Stoning was a common method of executing the death-penalty among the Jews, and was especially prescribed for blasphemy (Lev. 24 : 16). It was necessarily without the walls of the city (Lev. 24 : 14; Numb. 15 : 35; 1 Kings 21 : 13; Heb. 13 : 12). **The witnesses laid down their garments.** — The two witnesses who were required under Jewish law in order to the condemnation of every accused person, were, on the infliction of the sentence, to cast the first stones; afterward the people generally were to join (Deut. 17 : 5-7). In order to be disencumbered, they first laid off the outer garment, the cloak or mantle, leaving on only the under-garment, or tunic. **At the feet of a young man named Saul.** — These cloaks were put in Saul's charge for safe-keeping. Of his age the phrase *young man* gives little idea. He could hardly have been over forty; if, as was apparently the case from his participation in the action of the council here, and from the commission given to him in ch. 9 : 1, 2, he was a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been more than thirty. — *Abbott*.

59, 60. Calling upon the Lord. — The words *the Lord* are not in the Greek, but are evidently to be supplied, as is plain from the next clause: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." It is a direct prayer to Jesus, and moulded upon two of the *seven* sayings of the Redeemer on the cross. To Jesus as Saviour he commends his parting soul; to Jesus as Lord of all he prays for pardon on his murderers. — *Schaff*. **He fell asleep,** may simply mean *he died*, a figure common in the dialect of Homer, and perhaps in every other; but it more probably implies that the martyr died a peaceful death, notwithstanding the fury of his murderers and the violent means by which he lost his life. The same exquisite figure reappears in Paul's description of departed Christians as those who are *fallen asleep*

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (2) And devout men buried Stephen,

in Christ (1 Cor. 15, 18), and those who sleep in Jesus (1 Thes. 4: 14). — *Alexander.*

1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. — Was heartily approving of his execution. The word conveys more than a mere "consent" (as will be seen from Luke 11: 48; Rom. 1: 32; 1 Cor. 7: 12, 13). How much more there was in this case his own confession long afterwards reveals to us, ch. 22: 20; 26: 9-11. — *J. F. & B.* His name is specially mentioned among those who participated in putting Stephen to death, on account of his subsequent prominence in the Church. — *Schaff.* And there arose on that day a great persecution. — The persecution was in immediate succession to the death of Stephen. Having once proceeded to such a length, the rage of the people turned upon the whole Christian body. Against the Church which was in Jerusalem, i.e., the congregation which had grown up since the day of Pentecost. And they were all scattered abroad. — Thus the rage of their enemies brought about the dispersion which Christ had foretold (Acts 1: 8). By the word *all* we need not understand every member of the Christian body, but only those who had been most active and so were in special danger from the persecution. We find (v. 3) that there were many left, both men and women, in the city, whom Saul seized upon as "disciples of the Lord" and carried to prison. Throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria. — According to the order of extension indicated by Jesus (ch. 1: 8). — *Cam. Bib.* Except the apostles. — This seems to be at variance with our Lord's express command to them, "when they persecute you in this city, flee into another" (Matt. 10: 23). This has been variously explained by supposing that the twelve, from the awe with which they were regarded, or for some other reason now unknown, escaped the persecution; or, which is the simplest and most obvious solution, that the general rule, laid down in Matthew, was suspended or qualified by special revelation. Apart from the command in question, it is easy to imagine reasons why they should remain at the centre of operations, as the constituted organizers and administrators of the system which had just been set in motion, and as such imparting to the one Church of Jerusalem a representative and normal character, in consequence of which its acts were binding on the whole body, when extended even into other countries. — *Alexander.*

2. Devout men. — Whether Christians, or godly Jews not yet brought to the acceptance of Christianity, but sincerely desiring to know the truth, and impressed by the sincerity and earnestness of Stephen, is uncertain; probably the latter, since the phrase *devout men* is never used in the New Testament to describe Christians. Made great lamentation over him. — Literally, *made a great beating*, the ordinary Jewish lamentation being accompanied with beating on the breast and the like. This language implies that these devout men were still Jews in their feelings and customs, whether in heart Christians or no. — *Abbott.*

and made great lamentation over him. (3) But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and haling

men and women and committed them to prison.

(4) They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word.

3. But Saul laid waste, etc. — The word so rendered is properly used of wild beasts, or of hostile armies, devastating and ravaging. — *Alford*. **Entering into every house**, i. e., making his search everywhere that none should escape. — *Cam. Bib.* **Haling**. — An old English word for *hauling*, meaning "dragging by force." There was, as the persecutor himself afterward confessed (chap. 26 : 11), a kind of insane ferocity in his violence. Even the very word "haling" implies a brutality which might well have been spared. — *Ellicott*. **And women**. — To this aggravation which, under Oriental feeling and usage, was a most emphatic proof of his violence and bitterness reference is made in chap. 9 : 2 ; 22 : 4. — *Cook*. **Committed them to prison**. — For trial. Paul gives some additional particulars concerning this persecution, which apparently lasted some months ; perhaps throughout the summer. The Christians were scourged in the synagogues ; were imprisoned ; in some instances were put to death ; the only apparent escape was by blaspheming the name of Christ, i. e., openly renouncing allegiance to him, and adopting the Jewish verdict, that he was an impostor worthy of death (Acts 22 : 4, 19 ; 26 : 9-11 ; 1 Tim. 1 : 13. See also 1 Cor. 15 : 9 ; Gal. 1 : 13). — *Abbott*.

4. **The word**. — A common abbreviation for the *the word of God*, the Gospel, or the new religion. We have here a signal illustration of the providential law, according to which what appears to be an irretrievable calamity, is not only overruled, but designed from the beginning, to promote the very cause which it seems to threaten with disaster and defeat. *Alexander*.

ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Introduction. — We have had repeated occasion in the previous lessons, to notice the fact that the earlier conflicts of Christianity were with the Sadducees, rather than with Judaism in the main ; for the first preaching of the apostles was founded upon the resurrection of the crucified Nazarene. The Pharisees, secretly pleased at the attack upon the theory of their rivals, took no decisive steps against the Galilean heresy. But the time was now come when the Gospel in its breadth must be preached ; and the man who first clearly brought out the essential opposition of Christianity to an unspiritual and hardened Judaism, and thus threw down the gauntlet to Pharisaism, was Stephen. Henceforth the opposition to the infant Church takes a broader and fiercer aspect.

Stephen being in the presence of the council, and the testimony of the "suborned men" having been given, the high priest, as presiding judge, appealed to him, "Are these things so ?" The very mildness of the question indicates that there was something imposing in the appearance of the accused man.

In reply, Stephen entered upon his defence, which is given at some length (vs. 2-53). The key to the whole of this defence is contained in these words, "As your fathers did, so do ye" (v. 51). Adopting the historical method as more likely than any other to win attention, he had designed to trace the descent of the promise from Abraham down to its fulfilment, showing how their secret rejection of the Messiah had been rendered only too probable by their rejection of every one in whom their Messiah had been typified. And if they had rejected or slain every one who "showed before of the coming of the Righteous One," what wonder that when he, the Messiah, came, they had been his betrayers and murderers. They saw that this was the terrible conclusion upon which his merciless logic was rapidly converging, and they interrupted him by some burst of execration, as would appear from the sudden break at v. 51. This led the orator to drop the thread of his argument, and at once declare his conclusion (vs. 51-53). The result is the subject of our lesson.

Lesson Topics. — I. The Scene in the Council. II. The Death of the Martyr. III. The Persecution that Followed.

I. THE SCENE IN THE COUNCIL (vs. 54-56). — The terrible charge of Stephen brought matters to a crisis. The effect was instantaneous and decisive.

1. *The malignant rage of the judges* (v. 54). "They were cut to the heart." This expression is never used in Scriptures with reference to genuine penitence. On the day of Pentecost there were three thousand brought under conviction at once. And it is said of them that "they were *pricked* in their heart." That was a repentance unto life. Here there was remorse without repentance, the consciousness of guilt without the prayer for mercy, the terrible misgiving without the antidote to despair. "They were *cut* to the heart." It is the deep gashing wound, "the sorrow that worketh death." "They gnashed on him with their teeth." This was the visible expression of their malignant excitement. The intensity of their hate and rage appears in what follows. The wickedness of which the heart of man is capable has many manifestations; but never is it so strongly marked as in the contrasts presented in instances of religious persecution. On the one hand there is everything to conciliate regard; and on the other there are the worst of passions. See the meek and sinless Jesus; and, in contrast, hear the cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" See the face of the protomartyr shining like the face of an angel; and his enemies "gnashing on him with their teeth."

2. *The bearing and words of the accused* (vs. 55-56). Alone he stood before that relentless tribunal. Every face glowed with malignant bigotry. He read his doom on every angry brow. He could expect no mercy from such judges. The moment was a most trying one.

(a) What he received. "He, being full of the Holy Ghost." This had been declared of him before (6:5). The fact that it

is now mentioned again is an intimation that he received in that moment a special visitation of divine strength and comfort. The Scriptures abound in illustrations of the fact that God interposes in behalf of his servants in their times of special need, if not for their deliverance from the trial, then to strengthen them to bear it. If we obediently trust in the Lord, "mercy shall compass us about;" and we shall find that he is, as it is emphatically expressed "a very present help in time of trouble."

(b) What he did. "Looked up steadfastly into heaven." This was the immediate effect of the Divine visitation, and was not caused by the vision, which appears to have been vouchsafed afterwards. The action carries its own comment. It was an appeal from the injustice of earth to the eternal justice of Heaven; from merciless men to a compassionate God. Stephen's heroism and strength came not from within, but from above, — no defiant collecting of a man's resisting energies, resting on the centre of a clogged resolution, but the going out of himself to lay hold of another, an almighty power. Stephen "looked steadfastly into heaven;" committed his case there; and became mighty through God. One whose eye is fixed on heaven can trample equally under foot the smiles and the frowns of the world.

(c) What he saw. "And saw the glory of God," a bright radiance such as that which in the tabernacle of old betokened God's immediate presence; "and Jesus," whom in his humiliation he had known below, now in his glory, "standing at the right hand of God," the place of power and authority. He saw "Jesus standing." After Christ had completed his mediatorial work, so that it was above all disaster and above all hostility, he "sat down . . . expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet." From that regal secession, from that kingly expectancy, nothing can move him. "The heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing; the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed." Not a ruffle comes upon his countenance, not a sign of agitation. Serene and royal he sits "expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet." But hush! there is silence in heaven, and all the "harpers harping with their harps" are mute, and all the wondering angels crowd to see the spectacle. The throne is vacant now, and he, the Lord of glory, *stands* in friendliest welcome, when, baptized with the fellowship of his own sufferings, the first brave martyr is facing death. This glorious vision was confined to Stephen. There were two things which were exceedingly important to him in that hour, — confirmation of his faith, and an increase of courage and comfort. The vision would bring him help in both these directions.

(d) What he said. In that moment of rapture, Stephen rose superior to the threatening circumstances of his position; and, oblivious of all around him, he cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right

hand of God." It is remarkable that this is the only time that our Lord is called "the Son of man" after his ascension. May not Stephen have been reminded, for the encouragement of his faith, of the original use of the title in Daniel 7:13, 14, — where "One like the Son of man" is represented as coming in the clouds of heaven, and receiving dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and languages should serve him.

II. THE DEATH OF THE MARTYR (vs. 57-60). — The thought of God has a maddening effect on what is purely evil. When the rulers heard the words of Stephen, their savage yells burst forth anew; they stopped their ears, flew upon him, swept him from the chamber with a rush, and hurried him for execution beyond the northern city gate. Here is the first mention of Saul of Tarsus. He had given his vote for the death of the martyr, and he may have been deputed to see the sentence executed. The witnesses summoned according to law to cast the first stone laid their clothes at his feet. The first martyrdom of a Christian, like the death of Christ himself, was a mixture of legal form with popular violence. The people now, as well as their rulers, were bitter against the new faith. Their urgent violence has saved the Sanhedrin from a difficulty. It might have been too serious a stretch of jurisdiction to sentence and execute a blasphemer without reference to the Roman procurator. It was easy to plead their inability to hinder a mob from taking the law into its own hands.

And now, under a cruel shower of stones, the brave and faithful Stephen is dying. Look at him in his death.

1. *His prayer.* He died "calling upon the Lord." He needed prayer to the end, because to the end he needed Divine support. No former blessing would answer for him at that hour. No vision of the opened heavens could supersede the necessity of direct communications of Divine help and comfort. Still, therefore, he must pray. He had long before learned the way of prayer, and it was easy and natural to him now, when he needed it so much. Learn the habit and realize the power of prayer now, for the time is coming when, in the direst extremity, you shall need it; and, in life or in death, you shall not call upon the Lord in vain.

2. *His faith.* Christ was recognized by the dying martyr, and into his hands he confidently commended his spirit. In his mind there could be no gloom as to the future, for his death was only the surrender of his spirit into the hands of his glorified Lord. It is our privilege to die like Stephen. We may see no such glorious vision; but that is entirely immaterial. Paul saw no such vision when he faced death, but he could employ the same language of blessed assurance; "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. . . . Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing."

3. *His love.* "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." There is no room

for resentment in a soul ripe for heaven. The martyr met his doom upon his knees. He sought forgiveness in his dying hour, but not for himself. That matter had been attended to before. Following the example of his Divine Master, he prayed for his murderers. How impressive the contrast between the wild and lawless mob, and the kneeling martyr praying for his enemies. The Bible has scarcely a finer picture than this. The very tragedy teems with beauty. And thus does the holy Faith of the Redeemer shed so heavenly a lustre over the darkest pictures of life that the tragical is ever lost in the beautiful. The day dies with a golden smile upon its brow; and so the closing scene of a holy life gleams often with the most heavenly hues. Faith inspires the spirit with its holiest strain, just as it plumes its wings and soars away to its final rest.

4. *His peace.* "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." It was a hard bed, but "he fell asleep!" And so die the servants of the Redeemer; for "so he giveth his beloved sleep." The process may be painful. They may be put to sleep by strange modes. One may be strangled by the bursting blood-vessel, or scathed by the burning fever, weakened to death by long disease, smitten in a moment by a single stroke, sung to rest by the storm: but the end of it is this,—he falls asleep! How soothing the voice which comes whispering on the wings of the angel of death, "Thy brother sleepeth!" "She is not dead, but sleepeth!" "And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him."

III. THE PERSECUTION THAT FOLLOWED (8: 1, 3, 4). — The first taste of blood only whetted the appetite of the persecutors. That day was the beginning of a changed order of things for the infant church. The martyrdom of Stephen was the sign for a general persecution. In these first verses of chapter 8 we have two things specially worthy of attention.

1. *A glimpse of Saul before his conversion* (vs. 1, 3). He was an accomplice in the murder of Stephen. He gives a most touching account of the fact himself (Acts 22: 20). And he was an infuriate leader in the general persecution. The word translated "laid waste," is commonly applied to wild beasts, and denotes the devastation they commit. Paul, after his conversion, frequently refers to his course at this period (Acts 21: 10; Gal. 1: 6, etc.). The fact that such a man became a great apostle demonstrates alike the mercy of God and the power of the Gospel.

2. *Persecution advancing the cause of truth* (v. 4). This has been so often the case that it has passed into a proverb, that "the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church." It thus works because it throws the advocates of truth more entirely upon their God; tends to make them more earnest, more united, more devout; thus they furnish in their lives a nobler manifestation of a Christian spirit. Then persecution scatters them among men whose sympathies, in many instances, are awakened on their behalf, and who are, therefore, the more disposed to attend to their teachings.





